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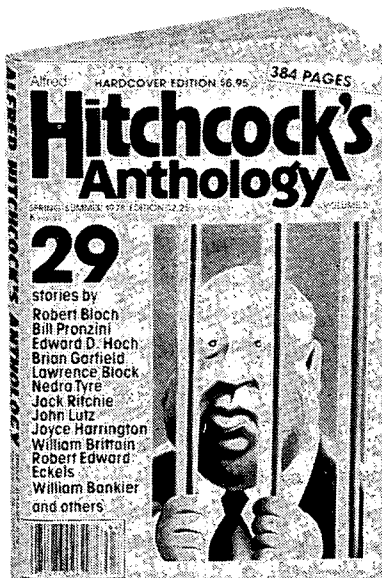
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JULY 1978

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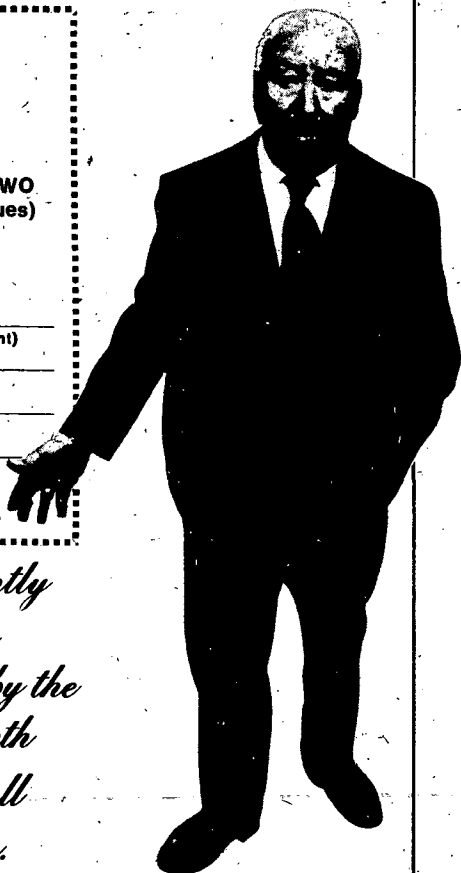
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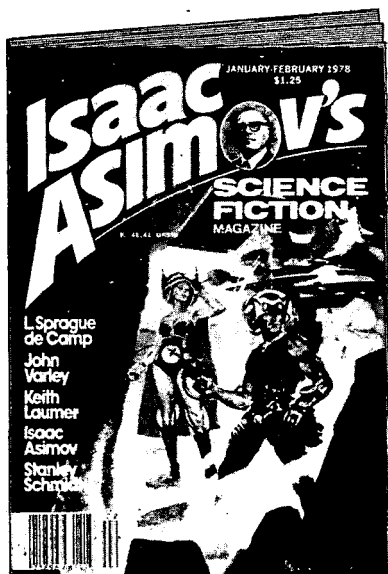
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July 1978

Dear Reader:

It's my great pleasure this month to introduce a really blazing issue, full of fireworks and excitement.

Starting it off is a very special event—the first story about a new detective by Joyce Porter—the Honorable Constance Morrison-Burke, who will make you sit up and take notice just as Miss Porter's eyebrow-raising Inspector Dover has for years.

The past is represented by an intriguing pastiche by John H. Dirckx of R. Austin Freeman's Dr. John Thorndyke, the future by John Lutz in a harrowing tale of how things could be if we continue to abuse our resources.

Salesmen, cameramen, workmen, newspapermen, second-story men—criminology, mycology, psychology—it's all here to make up, I think you'll agree, an issue to celebrate.

Good reading.

Alfred Hitchcock

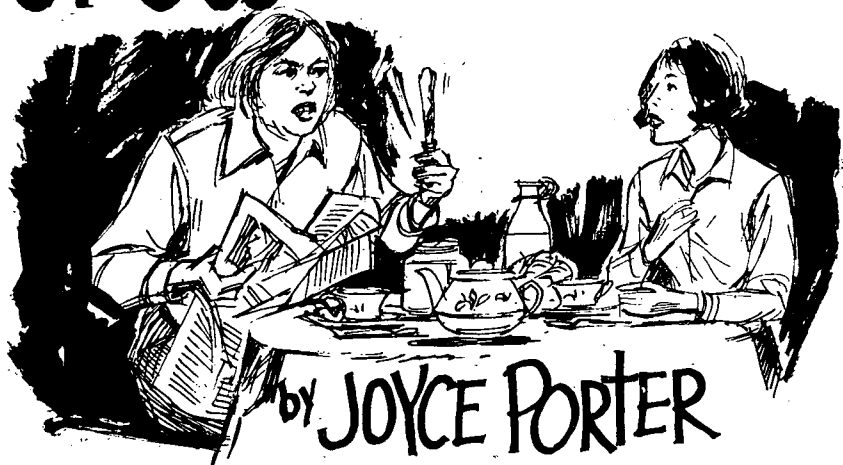
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The Honorable Constance could make life hell for local criminals and the police . . .

A GROSS MSCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE



According to the statistics, a town the size of Totterbridge can expect to have only one really interesting murder every fifteen years. Rape, kidnapping, bank robbery, and common assault are likely to be equally thin on the ground. There are some people who think that Totterbridge's respect for law and order has gone too far, and that a crime wave would be less damaging to the community than the Honorable Constance Morrison-Burke with time hanging heavy on her hands.

A GROSS MSCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE

5

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There were few areas in the town that didn't already bear the scars of the Honorable Constance's earlier attempts at participation. The pitiful remains of societies, organizations, and clubs that she had once enthusiastically joined and, subsequently, just as enthusiastically wrecked were littered generously around. For her to espouse a cause was to implant upon it the kiss of death. It is not surprising, therefore, that a general sigh of relief went up some years ago when it became known that the Hon. Con had decided to become an amateur detective. Since then, things had been marginally better as she expended her considerable energy on making life hell both for the local criminals and for the local police. This was why the caring citizens of Totterbridge—be their interests social, educational, charitable, or sporting—still welcomed the occasional outbreak of criminal activity.

On the particular Friday morning when our story begins, the Hon. Con was installed at the breakfast bar in the dinette of her bijou residence at "Shangri-la," 14 Upper Waxwing Drive, perusing the local newspaper.

"More tea, dear?"

The inquiry came from Miss Jones who, having retrieved *The Daily Telegraph* from where the Hon. Con had earlier dropped it on the floor and refolded it tidily, was now free once more to minister to the needs of the Hon. Con's inner woman.

The Hon. Con grunted and Miss Jones obediently picked up the milk jug.

This might be a convenient point at which to clarify Miss Jones's position in Honorable Constance's household, except that her position was by no means clear. Even the Hon. Con's attitude toward her was tinged with a certain ambivalence. Although she expected her to undertake all the domestic chores, she habitually introduced her as "old Bones, a chum of mine." However, one or two aspects of the relationship were not open to doubt: at "Shangri-la" it was the Honorable Constance who paid the piper, called the tune, and wore the trousers.

"Jumping Jehoshaphat!"

Miss Jones managed to get the milk jug out of range as the Hon. Con caught *The Totterbridge Times & Advertiser* with a savage right uppercut.

"You seen this, Bones?"

"Seen what, dear?"

"There's been another fatal accident on that dratted bypass!" Her fists pulverized the offending newspaper and her eyes bulged dangerously. "I knew we should never have been so weak-kneed as to take no for an answer!" She watched Miss Jones stirring her tea for her. "I was all for storming the council offices and debagging that stinker of a town clerk."

"Actually, I thought it was the police, dear, who wouldn't let you have a thirty-mile-an-hour speed limit."

It had, indeed, been the chief constable who had spiked the guns of AGGRO—the Action Group for General Road Opposition—but even Constance hadn't been quite rash enough to propose burning down the central police station. (The eventual disintegration of the group, thanks to a bunch of milksops who didn't agree with the Hon. Con that tarring and feathering was necessarily the answer in every case, is a complicated and blood-stained story that need not detain us here.)

Miss Jones passed the cup of tea over. "Who was it who got killed, dear? Anybody we know?"

"A geezer called Bartholomew Cuthbertson," grunted the Hon. Con. "A local chappie. He went straight off the road in broad daylight on Monday and finished upside down in the ditch with a broken neck. No other vehicle involved and the road surface was as dry as a bone."

"Good heavens! Was he drunk?"

"Nope," said the Hon. Con, licking the last of the marmalade off her knife in the interests of economy. "Barbiturates, according to the evidence at the inquest. The silly chump was taking 'em for depression. It seems he'd no right to be driving at all in that state, and the whisky he'd had at lunchtime didn't help. The coroner did his usual bit of pontificating, of course. He said doctors ought to be more careful about warning their patients when they prescribe drugs that might impair their reason and judgment."

"How awful!" murmured Miss Jones, who had a tender heart. "How old was he, dear?"

"Fifty-one," reported the Hon. Con, ripping open the newspaper again to get at the facts. "He leaves a widow but no kids. He lived on Sheerwater Road and was chief accountant at the area headquarters of the Gas Board. He was sidesman at St. Boniface's Church and a lay preacher, a well-known public speaker and—"

"Oh, dear!" wailed Miss Jones, suddenly going white. "That Mr.

Cuthbertson!"

The Hon. Con interpreted this *cri-de-coeur* correctly. "You knew him, Bones?"

"Oh yes, dear! He took part in our Mock Parliament at the Ladies' Social Guild only last week. We had two gentlemen as guest speakers—one for each side, you know. It seems to give our little debates more punch, somehow. And he was such a fine-looking man. Oh, who would have thought—" Miss Jones got her hankie out.

"In the midst of life!" pronounced the Honorable Constance and pushed her chair back. She was losing interest in the accident on the bypass, especially as Miss Jones had known the deceased and she hadn't. "Are you going shopping this morning, old fruit?"

"But, Constance"—Miss Jones's brow was furrowed in thought—"there must be some mistake."

"About what?" The Hon. Con linked her hands behind the back of her neck and, tensing her muscles, held her breath for ten seconds.

"About Mr. Cuthbertson taking barbiturates. He wouldn't. He didn't believe in that sort of thing."

The Hon. Con expelled her breath slowly and glanced down to see if the exercises were having any effect on her spare tire. "Says who?"

"He did, dear. Most eloquently. That's what we were debating, you see—"That This House Considers the National Health Service a Luxury We Can No Longer Afford.' Mr. Cuthbertson was proposing the motion and I remember him saying categorically that he'd only visited his doctor once in the last five years and that was for an ingrowing toenail. That was his point, you see, that the Health Service would be all right if everybody else did the same, but they don't and so it isn't."

The Hon. Con was no longer listening. She'd seized the newspaper again and was hurriedly rereading the account of the inquest on Mr. Cuthbertson. No, she hadn't got it wrong. Cuthbertson had driven at high speed off a perfectly straight road whilst under the influence of some anti-depressant drug—a barbiturate—whose effects had been aggravated by the consumption of alcohol.

She struck herself a dramatic blow on the forehead with the flat of her hand as comprehension dawned. "Stone a crow, Bones," she belowed, "do you realize what this means? The cops have cooked the evidence! Rather than admit that I was right and that this section of road is a veritable death trap, they've labelled this poor blighter a drug

addict! It's a cover-up!"

Miss Jones blamed herself, really. Why, oh why, hadn't she thought before she spoke? Ever since the Hon. Con, only last week, had been unfrocked as a school governor for calling the day they stopped sending little boys up chimneys the blackest in "our island's history," she'd been looking for some other mission to get her teeth into. And now Miss Jones, of all people, had presented her with one on a plate—a crusade against the police, no less. Of course, the Hon. Con had been accusing the police for years of blind prejudice where she was concerned, but now she was going to charge them with blatant corruption and a flagrant misuse of their powers. Miss Jones, knowing the whole business could only end in tears, tried to put the brakes on the Hon. Con's bounding enthusiasm, but she tried in vain.

"I'm afraid it's a simple question of duty, Bones," declared her friend gravely. "The cops claim this poor chappie went through the pearly gates because he'd been knocking back the old tranquilizers or what-have-you, but you tell me he never touched the things. There's a discrepancy there I'm honor-bound to investigate."

"But not to accuse the police of fabricating evidence, dear!" moaned Miss Jones.

"They have a motive for covering things up," the Hon. Con pointed out, being very patient and reasonable. "Otherwise they'd have to admit that that road is dangerous and ought to have a speed limit on it and I was right all along. Well, you know what the cops think about me, Bones. They'll stop at nothing to obstruct and discredit me."

"Maybe Mr. Cuthbertson wasn't telling the truth, dear," suggested Miss Jones, clutching feverishly at any straw in the wind. "He was making a debating point, after all."

"Good thinking, Bones!" Constance beamed approvingly at her chum's perspicacity. "Cuthbertson could well have been lying his head off, though it sounds like jolly odd behavior for a Gas Board accountant. The point is that, as of now, we simply don't know where the truth lies. That's why we have to have a full-scale investigation. Now"—the Hon. Con consulted her wristwatch with a masterful flourish—"we'll leave in precisely twenty minutes. That'll give you time to get the washing-up done and tidy the sitting room while I"—the Hon. Con was anxious to demonstrate that the burdens were being shared fairly—"repair to my den and work out a plan of action."

Miss Jones resolved to take one of her tablets. She hadn't actually gotten her palpitations yet, but. . . "Where are we going, dear?"

The Hon. Con grinned. You could always rely on old Bones when the chips were down. "We're going to grill the late Cuthbertson's doctor," she explained cheerfully, "having first extracted his name and address from the widow. Let's just keep our fingers crossed"—her voice and face darkened—"that those dratted cops haven't gotten there first!"

Since with the Honorable Constance the word tended to be the deed, it was no time at all before she was parking the mini on Sheerwater Road outside a large and well-kept detached house. The Hon. Con was impressed. "They must pay you jolly well in the Gas Company," she grumbled to Miss Jones as she extricated herself from behind the steering wheel. "I only wish I could afford to live in a place like this!" As a matter of fact, the Hon. Con could probably have afforded to live in Buckingham Palace if she'd felt like it, but she habitually pretended that black ruin was staring her in the face. She thought it stopped people trying to get money out of her. She shut the car door and addressed Miss Jones again through the open window. "Are you sure you don't want to come in with me?"

Miss Jones was quite sure, thank you. There had been a bit of a tiff back at "Shangri-la" and she was still huffy about it. Miss Jones, being a clergyman's daughter, didn't think that green corduroy trousers and a hacking jacket in Hunting Stewart was a fitting garb in which to go calling on a recently bereaved widow. The very least the Hon. Con could do was put a skirt on. The Hon. Con didn't agree. She only, she reminded Miss Jones, wore a skirt to the actual funeral. Miss Jones had then pursed her lips very tightly.

The Hon. Con was generally rather insensitive to other people's feelings. Not only had she trampled blithely over Miss Jones's sartorial credo but it never occurred to her, for example, that Mrs. Cuthbertson might not be up to discussing her husband's affairs with a total stranger so soon after his death.

"Not seeing anybody?" The Hon. Con glowered at the woman who had answered the front door. "But, dash it all, I've come from the other side of town! I mean, she's not sick or anything, is she?"

No, Mrs. Cuthbertson wasn't sick exactly, she was upset. "We only cremated him yesterday, you know. Perhaps you could call back later.

In a week or two, say, when she's feeling more like herself." The lady who had opened the door now looked as though she would like to close it, were it not for the fact that the Hon. Con's stout and highly polished brogue had somehow got in the way.

"I can't wait a week or two."

"Well, I'm sorry."

Luckily the Honorable Constance had one infallible trick up her sleeve. "I am the Honourable Constance Morrison-Burke," she announced loftily, "and I'm here on a matter of national importance."

It worked like a charm. Every Englishman loves a lord, of course, and most Englishwomen have a soft spot for an earl's daughter. In the twinkling of an eye, the Hon. Con had been ushered through the front door and installed in a deep armchair in the Cuthbertsons' spacious lounge. Both bars of the electric fire were recklessly switched on and a hand stretched out toward the sherry decanter.

When hospitality could extend no further, the Hon. Con's hostess introduced herself. She was Mrs. Enid Whitehead, sister of Mrs. Cuthbertson. "Perhaps I can help you," she suggested, "what with Marion being indisposed."

The same thought had crossed the Hon. Con's mind but, when it came down to it, Mrs. Whitehead was frustratingly unhelpful.

"Well, it must be sixteen years since I saw him last," she said apologetically. "I never could stand him. He was too blooming sanctimonious for me. I like a man with a bit of fun about him, know what I mean? But Bartholomew! Would you believe a lay preacher?" She leaned forward and lowered her voice. "Frankly, between you and me, I don't know what Marion's making such a fuss about. If you ask me, she's well rid of him. It'll give her the chance to go out and see a bit of life while she's still young enough to enjoy it. I mean, it's not as though she won't be all right financially, is it?"

"Isn't it?"

Mrs. Whitehead's voice dropped even lower. "She'll be very comfortable," she confided knowingly. "Very comfortable! God knows, Bartholomew had his faults, but under-insurance wasn't one of them. There'll be a pretty penny coming there."

"Whacko!" said the Hon. Con, holding out her sherry glass for a refill with a clear conscience.

"Then there'll be a pension from the Gas Board. He'd worked for

them since he was fifteen, you know, and they'll not be ungenerous when it's us blooming consumers footing the bill. And there's this house." Mrs. Whitehead broke off to stare enviously around the expensively furnished room. "What do you think this place will fetch on the open market?"

Constance could have named a figure, but refrained. "He doesn't sound like a man who would have to take stuff for his nerves," she said hopefully.

Mrs. Whitehead stared. "Nerves?" she repeated scornfully. "Him? He hadn't a nerve in his body."

"But what about the barbiturates? You know, the stuff they found in his body after the accident?"

"Search me, dear! All I can say is, it doesn't sound a bit like Bartholomew. When I knew him he thought a couple of aspirins was taking the coward's way out. Still, people change, don't they? And, like I said, it's donkey's years since I saw him."

Having got confirmation of her own opinion, the Hon. Con sensibly didn't push her luck by probing further. Instead, she asked Mrs. Whitehead for the name of Mr. Cuthbertson's doctor.

Mrs. Whitehead's suspicions had been thoroughly dulled by three glasses of sherry and she didn't find the question at all odd. "I'll just go and ask Marion," she promised obligingly. "I shan't be a tick!"

She was nearly as good as her word. The Hon. Con had only had time to price half the contents of the room before Mrs. Whitehead was back, her downcast face presaging the bad news she carried.

The Hon. Con was inclined to take these little setbacks personally. "He's dead?" she echoed, depositing her sherry glass very crisply on the occasional table. "When did he die, for heaven's sake?"

"Only last week," said Mrs. Whitehead anxiously. "It had been in the cards for ages. Marion says he was very shaky and well over retiring age, but he was so kind and understanding."

A fat lot the Hon. Con cared! "What was his name?"

"Strong. Dr. Strong."

"Address?"

"Marion doesn't actually know his home address, but his surgery was in Chandler Street. Will that do?"

"It'll have to, won't it?" growled the Hon. Con.

"He belonged to one of these group practices, so perhaps there'll be

somebody there who can help you."

"Perhaps," said the Hon. Con and took her leave.

Miss Jones received the news of old Dr. Strong's thoughtless behavior with indifference. This was rather off-putting as the Honorable Constance was about to call upon her chum for assistance slightly above and beyond the normal bounds of duty. The problem lay in the fact that Miss Jones had a far wider circle of acquaintance in Totterbridge than the Hon. Con did.

"How about," she said, "a cup of coffee?"

Miss Jones brightened. "Oh yes, dear!" she said. "I'll be glad to get back home."

"I was thinking we might try The Singing Kettle," said Constance casually, naming Totterbridge's most exclusive café without a tremor.

She'd gone too far, of course.

Miss Jones sighed and folded her neatly gloved hands in her lap. "What is it you want, Constance dear?"

The Hon. Con stifled the suspicion that old Bones had second sight. "It's just that you know that receptionist woman who works for those doctors in Chandler Street, don't you?" she asked with disarming directness.

Miss Jones frowned. "You mean Miss McDarby? Well, yes, we did happen to share the same hymn sheet at last year's carol service."

"I thought you were more intimate with her than that!" objected the Hon. Con, industriously cleaning the windscreen with her forefinger and spit. "I thought you shared a hymn book with her every week."

"If you were more regular in your church attendance, dear," said Miss Jones sternly, "you'd realize that nobody shares a hymn book any more. Nowadays we have, unfortunately, more hymn books than people. Still" —Miss Jones relented as she always did—"what is it you want me to do?"

"Just ask this McDarby woman to let you have a peep at Cuthbertson's medical records. They'll still be kicking around even though Dr. Strong isn't."

Miss Jones wilted. "But medical records are highly confidential documents, Constance," she moaned. "Miss McDarby will never agree for a moment to let me go rooting around in— No, Constance, you're asking far too much, apart from the fact that it's probably illegal."

"Oh, rats!" retorted the Hon. Con crossly. "It's all in a good cause."
"Is it, dear?"

The Hon. Con was indignant. "Come off it, Bones!" she urged. "You jolly well know it is! Look, the police get a fatal accident on a road they've just assured everybody is perfectly safe. You remember that chief constable bounder at the inquiry, don't you? He all but gave his Bible oath that there was no need for a speed limit there. Well, with Cuthbertson's death they're right up a gum tree, aren't they? So what do they do?"

"They don't start fabricating evidence, Constance dear!" replied Miss Jones with quite a little show of spirit.

"What other explanation is there? You yourself, Bones, said you couldn't believe old Cuthbertson would ever go knocking back tranquilizers, and his wife and sister-in-law said the same dashed thing." This, as sharp-eyed readers will have noticed, was not strictly the case, but the Hon. Con was a fervent believer in what might be called the elasticity of truth. "Unfortunately, what they say and what you say isn't evidence, but Dr. Strong's records will be. They'll prove that when Cuthbertson went hurtling off that road he wasn't under the influence of barbiturates."

"But why should the police bring drugs into it at all?" asked Miss Jones miserably as the Hon. Con started the car and drove off in what was only too obviously the direction of Chandler Street. "Why not just say he'd been drinking?"

The Hon. Con had been endowed with a lively imagination and didn't see why she shouldn't use it. "Because there was plenty of proof that he hadn't," she said firmly. "He'd been out to lunch with a couple of pals and they were prepared to swear that he hadn't drunk more than one small whisky—a fact the cops were quick to use, if you remember, to back up their story about the effect the barbiturates had on him."

The Hon. Con brought the mini to a halt and, leaning across Miss Jones, kindly opened the door for her. "We've timed it nicely. You'll just catch Miss McDarby at the end of morning surgery. Now don't make a song and dance about it, Bones! Simply get your chum to let you have a look at Bartholomew Cuthbertson's medical records and copy out the relevant bits. I don't suppose she'll let you bring the actual documents away with you."

"I don't suppose she'll even let me see them," said Miss Jones acidly. She got out of the car. "She's a frightfully conscientious person."

"Oh, tell her it's a matter of life and death!" snapped the Hon. Con, who hadn't progressed thus far in her investigation to be thwarted by Miss McDarby's blooming scruples. "And when you've finished, warn her to hide those records in a safe place and guard them with her life. Once I make my findings public, the cops will have no choice. They'll have to destroy the records to save their miserable skins!"

Miss Jones disappeared up the steps into the large house that had been converted for the Chandler Street Group Medical Practice and the Hon. Con settled down to wait. With an old gasbag like Bones on the job, it was no good expecting quick results.

The Hon. Con whipped through half a dozen of her isometric exercises.

Suffering cats, how much longer?

She watched the patients arriving and departing. Blooming scroungers, most of 'em!

She cleaned out the glove compartment and was rewarded by finding half a bar of long-forgotten chocolate. She gobbled it down gratefully.

It was nearly an hour before Miss Jones returned.

"Any luck?" demanded the Hon. Con, prepared to swallow her reproaches if only Miss Jones had brought home the bacon.

"I'm afraid not, dear." Miss Jones was sorry to have to disappoint the Hon. Con but, really, it was no more than she deserved. "All poor Dr. Strong's records were burned to ashes a couple of days after he died."

"Burned?" screamed Constance. "What do you mean—burned?"

"It was pure vandalism, dear."

"I'll say it was vandalism!" roared the Hon. Con. "I'll have the law on them! Don't those idiots know you're not allowed to destroy valuable documents like that?"

"Oh, they didn't do it, dear," explained Miss Jones, wincing just a little as the Hon. Con's voice rolled thunderously around the close confines of the mini.

"Don't tell me it was an accident!" scoffed the Hon. Con.

"Well, only that the door to Dr. Strong's consulting room was left open rather carelessly, perhaps," admitted Miss Jones. "They think it

must have happened during evening surgery."

The Hon. Con's meager supply of patience was running out. "What must have happened?" she howled with every decibel at her command.

Miss Jones spoke very, very quietly. "That's what I'm trying to tell you, dear. Mind you, it's all guesswork, but Miss McDarby did have quite a little chat with the senior fire officer. You see, after his death, Dr. Strong's patients were shared out amongst the other doctors, and during the evening surgery the door of his consulting room had to be left unlocked so that the receptionists could pop in and get the patients' files as they were required. You understand, dear?"

"Perfectly!" snarled the Hon. Con. "Get on with it, can't you?"

"Well, toward the end of evening surgery presumably, somebody must have slipped into Dr. Strong's room, pulled open the top drawer of his filing cabinet, and popped a lighted candle in amongst the envelope things they keep the patients' records in."

"Whereupon the candle gradually burned down until it set fire to the papers!" The Hon. Con shook her head in rueful admiration. "The cunning blighters!"

"How on earth did you work that out, dear? Oh, aren't you clever! That's exactly what happened! The last patient left about eight o'clock but they don't think the actual fire started until a couple of hours after that, and it was at least another hour before Mrs. Vickers—she's the chief receptionist and has a flat upstairs—noticed there was anything amiss and raised the alarm. By the time the fire brigade arrived the whole room was alight; they were lucky the house didn't go. They thought it was an electrical fault at first, Miss McDarby says, but then they came up with this theory about the candle."

"I couldn't have done better myself," said the Hon. Con, thus awarding the arsonist her five-star rating. "And you see the point of sticking the candle in the *top* drawer of the filing cabinet, I hope?"

Miss Jones shook a humble, Watsonian head.

"That's where the beginning of the alphabet would be, you ninny! C for Cuthbertson! Even if the alarm had been raised much earlier, that section of the patients' records would still have been reduced to ashes."

"How do you think of these things, dear?" cooed Miss Jones.

The Honorable Constance smirked modestly. "I happen to have built up a pretty good idea of how the police mind works, Bones, old fruit,"

she confessed with a wry chuckle. "Having made a study of their psychology."

"But, Constance dear"—in all honesty Miss Jones couldn't stifle common sense entirely—"you're not seriously accusing the police of setting fire to Dr. Strong's consulting room, are you?"

"I jolly well am!" retorted the Hon. Con stoutly. "Tarnation take it, Bones, don't you listen to anything I say? It's all part of the plot to cover up the true cause of Cuthbertson's death. Once they'd committed themselves to saying he'd taken these drug things, they could hardly leave evidence lying around in old Strong's surgery that could prove that he hadn't, could they? They had to start the fire."

Miss Jones steeled herself. "But I've been thinking, dear, and the dates don't fit."

The Hon. Con's noble brow darkened: "How about leaving the detective work to me, old girl?" The hint dropped like an icy brick.

But Miss Jones had courage, even if it was somewhat of the cornered-mouse variety. Besides, she had to save the Hon. Con from possible public obloquy and derision. "Mr. Cuthbertson," she pointed out cautiously, "met his death in that road accident on the bypass several days after Dr. Strong died and at least two days after his records were destroyed."

"So what?" It was more of a threat than a question.

"So the police can't possibly be involved in an attempt to conceal the real reason for the accident because, if the evidence was cooked, it was cooked *before* poor Mr. Cuthbertson died."

There was a pregnant silence.

Miss Jones went nervously on. "Actually, dear, I've never been very happy about the idea that the police were fiddling things. There was the post mortem, wasn't there? I mean, if Mr. Cuthbertson hadn't been taking barbiturates and things, the doctors and the laboratory staff and everybody would have had to be involved, wouldn't they? Well, that sort of thing just doesn't happen, does it? Not here in England. Not in Totterbridge."

The Hon. Con raised a hand for silence. "Bones," she announced, eyes bulging and complexion approaching the apoplectic, "I have just unmasked a murder!"

Miss Jones clutched her palpitating heart. "A murder?"

"I can't think," mused the Hon. Con in bewilderment, "why I didn't

spot it before.”

Miss Jones was trying hard not to believe her ears. “Mr. Cuthbertson was murdered?”

“What else?” The mini rocked protestingly on its springs as the Hon. Con shifted her weight. “Come on, Bones, shake a leg!”

Miss Jones gathered up her gloves and handbag with trembling fingers. “Where are we going, dear?”

“Back in there to see your chum, Miss McDarby, again!” The Hon. Con was already out on the pavement. “Get your skates on, old bean!”

It's more than likely that Miss McDarby never really got the hang of what was going on. When the Hon. Con was racing along at full steam, lesser mortals got little chance of asking searching questions. Miss McDarby turned off the hot plate upon which she was heating some canned soup for her lunch and politely asked her unexpected guests to sit down.—

“No time for that!” barked the Honorable Constance, glaring at Miss Jones, who appeared to be on the point of collapse. Sometimes the way old Bones played to the gallery could be dashed annoying. “Now then”—the Hon. Con directed her glare back to Miss McDarby—“I want a list of all the patients who attended evening surgery on the day the fire broke out in old Strong's consulting room.”

Miss McDarby's mouth dropped slightly open.

“You can provide it, I hope?” The Hon. Con had been raised in a household of dim-witted domestics and knew there were few situations that shouting couldn't clarify.

To everyone's surprise, Miss McDarby not only could supply such a list but she could supply it without much difficulty. “We had to prepare one for the police, you see,” she explained as she trotted over to the filing cabinets. “Once there was a suspicion of arson we had detectives swarming all over the place.” She began pulling drawers out with an aimlessness that sent the Hon. Con's blood pressure soaring. “We all had to make statements, of course.” Her hand hesitated before settling on yet another handle. “I know Mrs. Vickers opened a new file for it,” she murmured to herself, “but did she put it under P for Police or F for Fire?”

The Hon. Con tossed common courtesy to the winds. “Hurry up, woman!”

"D for Damage!" trilled Miss McDarby triumphantly and slid out the appropriate drawer. "And here's your list!"

The Hon. Con grabbed and ran a questing eye down the names. "I thought so!" She turned to the still-wilting Miss Jones. "Here you are, Bones! What did I tell you, eh?"

Miss Jones read the name at which the Hon. Con's stubby finger was pointing. It came as no surprise. Mrs. Marion Cuthbertson.

"There's our murderer!" The Hon. Con folded the list up and tucked it away in her pocket.

"Are you sure, dear?"

"As I'm standing here!" declared the Hon. Con. "We'll never be able to prove anything, of course, but there's no doubt about the acts."

Miss McDarby was all ears—not that it did her much good.

"It was the death of Dr. Strong that triggered the whole thing off," said the Hon. Con.

This time Miss Jones sat down, regardless. "Oh, don't say he was murdered too, dear!"

The Hon. Con sighed. "Try showing a bit of horse sense, Bones!" she begged. "Of course he wasn't. But it was his death that our killer had been waiting for. All she had to do now was destroy his medical records so that there'd be no proof that he hadn't prescribed tranquilizers for her husband, old Cuthbertson. She duly attended evening surgery, seized her opportunity, and shoved the candle into the filing cabinet. After that, the way was wide open for the crime of the century, although she naturally had to wait for the right moment, like when her victim was going to be driving his car on a fast road like the bypass after having a drink or two at lunchtime. Soon as *der Tag* arrives, she simply laces his breakfast cornflakes with barbiturates."

"Wouldn't he notice the taste, dear?"

"Obviously he didn't," grunted the Hon. Con.

"And where did she get the pills from, dear?"

"My guess is that they were prescribed for her herself," said the Hon. Con, who seemed to have no trouble finding an answer to everything, "but, since she destroyed her own medical records with her husband's, we shall never know." The Hon. Con buttoned up her hacking jacket and took out the car keys. "This is one of the cleverest murders it has ever been my lot to encounter," she told her awe-struck

audience. "As far as I can see, there's absolutely no way Mrs. Cuthbertson can be made to pay for her heinous crime."

Miss Jones was still not entirely happy. "It was all a trifle hit-and-miss, wasn't it, dear? I mean, for all Mrs. Cuthbertson knew, her husband could have come over queer or whatever when the car was stationary or going very slowly."

"Oh, I don't doubt she made several earlier attempts that didn't work," said the Hon. Con, shrugging her ample shoulders and turning on her heel. "Why not?"

Miss Jones said goodbye to a bemused Miss McDarby and trotted off after the Hon. Con. "Do you think the police are likely to make the same deductions as you, Constance dear?"

The Hon. Con unlocked the mini. "No, I don't. And I'll tell you why. In the first place they don't have my powers of reasoning, and in the second they're too departmentalized. You see, the vital link was connecting the fire in the surgery with Cuthbertson's death in the road accident. I made the connection because I could see the overall picture, but the way the cops work they haven't a hope. The C.I.D. would investigate the fire, but the traffic division would deal with the road accident. Like I said, they're too departmentalized."

"You don't think you ought to tell the police about your theory, dear?"

"And have them laughing their silly heads off at me again?" asked the Hon. Con indignantly. She wrenched the car door open and began to squeeze herself inside.

"I don't have to remind you, Bones, how our local constabulary habitually receives my offers of help. Besides"—she stretched across to unlock the passenger door—"you seem to have forgotten that the only reason I began investigating this case was to *expose* the cops. I'm hardly likely to go running to 'em now with a blooming murder they didn't even know existed. No, the Cuthbertson woman's gotten away with it and good luck to her! Now get in, and let's go home. I'm starving!"

The August issue of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale July 18.

Savington's promised satisfaction . . .

MARKED DOWN



Harold Turnquist and his wife Marie got to the sale at Savington's Department Store early, but still there were thousands ahead of them. The brisk fall air had brought them out.

This winter was predicted to be even colder than last year's, when over 100,000 had frozen to death in New York alone. And now there was even less fuel for the neighborhood bonfires and the makeshift wood-burning stoves. The Turnquists had no illusions about what the

next several months held for them; they had burned half their furniture and all of their carpeting in last February's sub-zero temperatures.

Turnquist had been able to find temporary work, and they did have some cash that hadn't been ravaged by inflation. The Turnquists were among the lucky who could be here, at Savington's pre-winter annual outerwear sale.

Turnquist and his wife each would be able to get a coat if they could reach the third-floor sale area before everything was cleaned out. They would settle for anything that would protect them from the seeping cold, though Turnquist would prefer the ankle-length synthetic fiber-filled overcoat advertised for only \$2,599.99 in last month's paper and Marie the more stylish paper-shred-filled quilted knee-length with imitation-rabbit-fur collar. It was \$3,999.99, but then women's clothing was priced higher than men's.

An hour before the ten o'clock opening time, there were as many people behind the Turnquists as in front of them. The silent, somber mass pressed together like a tide governed by uncontrollable forces. Turnquist didn't mind. He was grateful for the warmth.

Marie, a small but strong woman with bright brown eyes and short, grey-flecked dark hair, had planned on attending the sale alone, before remembering that they had burned Harold's coat for cooking fuel during the summer, when the cold had seemed far away in time and the least of their problems.

But here it was October, and they stood in a sharpening cold waiting for Savington's to open to the rush of shoppers. Turnquist rested a comforting hand on his wife's shoulder and glanced between the unshorn heads of the men ahead of them at the large clock above the entrance. Nine-fifteen. He and Marie had a good position. At least one of them should manage to reach the coat department.

Turnquist had heard vague rumors about last year's sale, something about scores of people being trampled to death in the rush, their bodies left unclaimed and forgotten. Well, he could believe it, noting the increasing expectation and tension of those around him. Life was no longer held as precious as it once had been. A few people were bound to get hurt or killed. And since there would then be that many fewer to eat the dwindling food supplies, deplete the dwindling energy sources, the living would be better off.

"Why can't they open early?" a redheaded woman beside Turnquist

moaned. Even in the cool air she was perspiring, her face flushed and intent as she stared ahead at the huge, seemingly motionless clock hands mounted on the store's brick facade.

Armed guards were now peering from the windows on the upper floors. Outerwear would be the only item for sale at Savington's, the only department open, and anyone touching any of the other merchandise or wandering beyond the chains into restricted areas would immediately be shot. Everyone understood that. Those were the terms of the sale.

At one of the second-floor windows a man in a suit and tie appeared with a battered electric bullhorn, which he raised to his lips. "THE SALE WILL START IN FIVE MINUTES!" he proclaimed in a nasal electronic voice that carried over the milling thousands. "WE APPRECIATE YOUR PATIENCE, AND WE'RE SURE YOU'LL BE SATISFIED AT SAVINGTON'S!" Then he withdrew and the window was closed.

"Damn him!" a husky balding man said to the left of Turnquist. "He's got no trouble getting clothes. Or probably food or fuel or anything else. That might even be old Savington himself."

"So what do you want him to do," someone else said angrily, "go out of business? Then where would we buy what we need?"

"We'd steal it, like he does. Only I guess we'd do it illegally."

"Trouble with that," the flushed redheaded woman said, "is nobody except the rich has anything left to steal, and they know how to stick together and hang onto it."

The large black hand of the clock lurched a final exaggerated second and pointed straight up. The crowd became so silent that Turnquist felt a subtle uneasiness.

Ahead of him, wide doors opened. A murmur swelled like a thing rushing from great depths, broke to a roar, and the crowd surged forward with whoops, groans, curses, and the scraping of soles on hard cement. Turnquist and Marie were propelled from behind and gripped each other's hands to stay together. They were separated by the crush of the crowd, then brought back together as the mass of shoppers was funnelled through the store's open doors.

Turnquist saw a man fall and not get up. As he and Marie were pressed to breathlessness and forced through the doorway, a woman beside them was knocked into the metal door frame, spun, and con-

tinued forward, hunched and gripping her shoulder. Armed guards stood on platforms, waving everyone forward toward towering motionless escalators. "STRAIGHT AHEAD AND UPSTAIRS!" an electronically amplified voice directed over and over, "STRAIGHT AHEAD AND UPSTAIRS, PLEASE! WE'RE SURE YOU'LL BE SATISFIED AT SAVINGTON'S."

Turnquist and Marie managed to stay together up the steep metal escalator steps. Once Turnquist stubbed his toe painfully but ignored the pain and continued to climb, letting himself be carried for a moment by the rush of the crowd. A man fell from the escalator above, his body thudding broken and limp on the rubber rail before dropping into the restricted area on the first floor.

On the third floor Turnquist and Marie deliberately separated. It was the only way to find the coats they wanted before the supply was depleted. Turnquist elbowed his way in the direction of a large red arrow hung from a guard platform. Ahead of him were the coats. Elbows and shoulders churned as the piles of merchandise were sorted through desperately for acceptable sizes.

Turnquist was lucky. He pushed his way into an opening before the stacked counter and found a coat only two sizes too large. Clutching the balled coat to him in the manner of a fullback running a football, he turned, lowered his head, and in three quick steps was out of the melee about the counter. He headed for the checkout area to wait for Marie.

But he wasn't allowed to wait. "PAY HERE, PLEASE. MOVE ALONG!" repeated a crackling electronic voice. Turnquist obeyed, had his money ready, and paid the stiff-faced clerk behind the bars of the checkout booth.

Still clutching his coat, which he hadn't yet closely examined, Turnquist was politely but firmly directed to the down escalators.

Within minutes he was on the first floor. There were more amplified instructions. He turned to search the crowded escalators for Marie, but was moved along with pushes and prods and soon found himself in the street outside Savington's side exit.

Backed against a steel utility pole, Turnquist craned his neck to see the emerging shoppers. Marie should be somewhere among those dazed faces.

Then, surprisingly, she was beside him.

"Harold," she said, "look!" She held up not one but two coats. She had managed to get one for their eight-year-old daughter, Lara. They could now use Lara's tattered old coat for fuel.

Turnquist grinned, locked hands with Marie, and they fought their way free of the crowd that was building outside the exit.

Counting themselves lucky, they began the six-mile walk home.

Seated before the cold stone fireplace in their living room, they examined their coats.

Turnquist's coat was made of a flimsy, curious synthetic leather and seemed warm enough, though it had no collar and two of the buttons were missing. He started to point this out to Marie, then remained silent when he saw the angry disappointed expression on her face. The coat she had bought for Lara was badly ripped. Almost all of the paper-shred insulation had fallen out, and the thin lining hung useless and irreparable.

"You must have snagged it somewhere," Turnquist said.

Marie shook her head, and her face colored with anger. "I didn't! I was careful! It must have been like this when I bought it. I didn't unfold it, I only had time to look at the size." She refolded the coat neatly along its network of creases. "It will have to go back, Harold. Maybe they'll exchange it."

Turnquist wasn't sure Savington's would exchange the coat even if they kept some sort of reserve stock. But there was no point in upsetting Marie further.

"I'll return it tomorrow," he said.

When Turnquist approached Savington's the next afternoon, the four-story brick building seemed bleakly deserted. Only one uniformed security guard stood at the door, and he politely touched the visor of his cap as he saw Turnquist.

Turnquist smiled back. "I'd like to exchange something," he said. "Where do I go?"

The guard looked at him oddly for a moment, then shrugged. "Second floor east."

Turnquist thanked him, tucked the folded coat firmly beneath his arm, and pushed his way through the double doors.

The second floor was deserted except for some movement off to the

left among the rows of empty counters. Turnquist walked that way and saw a small thin man in a dark-blue suit.

The man smiled coldly at Turnquist's approach. "Can I help you?" he asked. He had a sallow complexion and an almost ridiculously sparse dark moustache.

"I'd like to exchange this," Turnquist said, holding out the folded coat. "It was defective when we bought it."

The man grew serious, flicked a knuckle over his scraggly moustache, and took the coat from Turnquist, and unfolded it. "How do we know this didn't happen after you bought the coat, sir?"

"Well, you can see it's never been worn; the tags are still on."

The smile slowly returned to the sallow features, as if a photograph were developing before Turnquist's eyes. "Are you sure you purchased this item here, sir?"

"Of course. Yesterday. Where else could I have purchased it?"

The smile held. "I'm sure I don't know, sir." He handed back the coat. "I'm sorry."

"You won't exchange it?"

"I'm sorry, sir."

As he stared at the man's steady smile, anger began to stir hotly in Turnquist. And envy. It must be easy to be so detached and cool if you were among the lucky ones with income. "Suppose I *demand* an exchange?" Turnquist moved forward with what he calculated was a hint of menace.

The smile flickered, endured. "I'm not authorized, sir. You'll have to see the manager, Mr. Mallory. He's near Sporting Goods on the third floor."

Turnquist walked away.

He was shown into Mallory's office with little delay. It was a surprisingly plush office, with thick blue carpeting, heavy draperies, and several rows of filing cabinets visible in a small room behind Mallory's grey metal desk. Mallory was a beaming chunky man in a dark suit. His smile seemed genuine.

"Mr. Gorham phoned me," he said when Turnquist had barely finished identifying himself. "He tells me you wish to make an exchange."

Turnquist stood before the desk, determined not to be cowed, and nodded. "This coat. It was torn when my wife bought it yesterday."

"You've been through all that with Mr. Gorham, haven't you?"

"Not to my satisfaction."

Mallory sat back down in his padded desk chair. "I see. . . ." His grin widened and he shook his head, as if reminding himself to be tolerant. "I'm afraid our policy is not to exchange, Mr. Turnquist."

"Then a refund."

Mallory shrugged his bunched shoulders. "That, too, is against policy. I'd like to help you—"

Now the anger was causing Turnquist's heart to pound, constricting his throat muscles so that he had to force his words. "Who makes this idiotic policy?"

Mallory cocked his head as if surprised Turnquist had to ask. "Why, Mr. Savington, sir."

"Then I'd like to see him."

Mallory leaned back, stared at Turnquist, and clucked his tongue in consideration. He ran his fingers over a smooth lapel of his suit. Turnquist wondered how much a suit like that cost. Five—ten thousand dollars? He felt suddenly ashamed of his own soiled and threadbare clothing.

Finally Mallory sighed and sat forward. He picked up a telephone, punched a button, and began explaining the situation to someone. After a long pause, he put down the phone.

"Mr. Savington will see you," he said. "He's on the fourth floor. You may take the elevator."

Turnquist felt better as he walked from Mallory's office. It always paid to complain to the top man. They had even turned on the auxiliary power to allow him to use the elevator; surely they'd refund his money for the coat.

When the elevator doors opened on the fourth floor, a well-groomed blonde secretary was waiting for Turnquist. She smiled impersonally and asked him to please follow her, and he walked behind her through a wake of perfume toward a tall door at the end of a long corridor.

She knocked once, lightly, opened the door, then closed it behind Turnquist.

The office was furnished in royal blue and gold. It was twice as large as Mallory's, twice as opulent. A gaunt man in his late sixties sat behind a wide polished-wood desk, writing something. He had silver-grey

hair, gold-rimmed spectacles, and a thin determined mouth. When he was finished writing he put down his pen, looked at Turnquist for the first time, smiled a cadaverous but strangely warm smile, and walked out from behind the desk to shake hands. He was wearing a perfectly cut brown pin-striped suit, the finest suit Turnquist had ever seen, and expensive-looking tan shoes that were highly polished and supple.

"David Savington," he said.

"Harold Turnquist." Turnquist took the cool dry hand, which vibrated with claw-like strength, and shook it.

The office door opened again and Turnquist caught a glimpse of the blonde secretary smiling as she moved aside to usher in Mr. Mallory.

"Now," Savington said, "I see no reason why we can't resolve this. We want you to be satisfied at Savington's." He walked to a credenza in a corner and opened it to reveal a plentiful stock of liquor. "Scotch, all right, Mr. Turnquist?"

"Fine," Turnquist said, shocked. Would Marie believe him when he returned home?

Savington handed Mallory and Turnquist their drinks and sat on the edge of his desk. He said nothing.

Turnquist sipped his Scotch. It was excellent. "What I want is to exchange this coat, Mr. Savington."

"Yes, Mr. Mallory told me. But I'm afraid that's impossible. Right now there simply are no more coats to be had anywhere. You have no idea the difficulty in obtaining materials for manufacture."

"Then a refund."

"Out of the question."

"But I don't understand."

Savington shook his head sadly. "I'm sure you don't. These are hard, hard times, Mr. Turnquist. It's increasingly difficult to maintain a reasonable profit margin."

Mallory stood smiling.

Anger surged in Turnquist. They had called him up here to make a fool of him, to explain to him how the rich got richer! He considered hurling his drink in Savington's smug face and stalking out, but Savington seemed to be moving, swaying. The entire office was swaying. Turnquist tried to lift his glass to look at the Scotch, but his arm was heavy and immovable. Without realizing he'd fallen, he was on the floor, struggling to rise with limbs too heavy to respond.

"Until later, Mr. Turnquist," Savington said casually.

"Later, sir?" Turnquist heard Mallory ask.

"Of course," came Savington's sardonic distant reply. "Second floor west. In Leather Goods."

Laughter rolled like muted faraway thunder.

Sprawled in the fading light, his cheek pressed numbly to the thick carpet, Turnquist's last sight was of Savington's elegant and very expensive shoes.



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Abner knew his nephews wanted his money

A MATTER OF MUSHROOMS

by
**LAWRENCE
TREAT**



It was there. In a carafe on the long, carved oak sideboard that he'd bought in Spain some forty years ago when he and Doris had been furnishing this house. He glanced around at the rest of the dining room. The sideboard was the outstanding piece of the set, and it took a room this size to show it off.

His eyes went back to the carafe and the crystalware next to it. He knew he shouldn't drink—not before noon, anyhow. He'd promised

them that, in this charade of affection where they pretended to love, cherish, and care for him, when all they wanted was his money. All of them except Evvy, of course. She was special.

He advanced gingerly, tottering a bit, telling himself he wasn't really losing his sense of balance, it was just that he lingered too long on one foot and it tipped him slightly. But nothing to worry about. Nothing, really.

He contemplated the carafe. It cost him a hundred dollars some twenty years ago. It had probably quadrupled in value, but what of it?

He lifted the glass stopper and sniffed. The suave delicate odor of mushroom drifted to his nostrils. He took a deep breath of it, then made up his mind. With those nephews of his upstairs, he could indulge himself. For once, neither Jamie nor Louis could tell him he ought not to drink, that he ought to take care of himself.

Take care of himself? He snorted. All they really wanted was to see him die, and the sooner the better. Even Dirk, Evvy's husband, was in on the act.

Abner filled a small glass with the liqueur and tasted it. It was delicious. Pleased with himself and with the world, he thought of the trick he'd played last week. He'd left his will in a desk drawer where he knew Jamie and Louis would both look if they ever sneaked into his room. And they had, both of them. The changed position of a scrap of paper proved it.

He'd typed out the will himself, and signed, sealed, and published it, with everything in order, including the cook as witness. It left everything to Evvy. Alongside it he had drafts of two other wills, unsigned, but indicating that he intended a change in which Evvy would have to share, half for herself and half to one of the nephews, although he hadn't made up his mind as to which.

The effect was pretty much what he'd expected. Jamie and Louis were falling all over themselves trying to butter him up. Mycology was his hobby? Good. They'd gone into it in a big way, reading his books on mushrooms and talking learnedly about *Craterellus cornucopioides* and *Lactarius deliciosus*. They even knew the difference between *Amanita rubescens*, which was edible, and *Amanita brunnescens*, which wasn't. They spent their days in the woods and came back limping and soon blistering from poison ivy.

Jamie was the one who'd thought up the idea of a mushroom

liqueur. "A flavor like that," he'd said, "ought to be glorified in alcohol."

"Too delicate," Abner said.

"I'll try it," Jamie said. "Now in Japan—"

Jamie didn't want to go back to his job in Japan. He wanted to stay here and inherit Abner's millions, or a goodly part of them. And Louis didn't want to go back to his computer factory and Dirk didn't want to go back to high school coaching and Evvy didn't want to go back to anything. She wanted to stay here with her uncle and sit at his knee for the rest of her life, just as she'd done when she'd been a child.

Abner stood holding the glass, daydreaming, then poured himself another drink. He had started to down it when someone called out.

"Uncle Abner!"

It was Louis, tall and saturnine and solemn. Always solemn. He never laughed, never got any fun out of life. He didn't even drink.

"Uncle Abner—what in blazes are you doing?"

"Just having a little drink. Won't hurt me, will it?"

"But that! It's amanita juice—*verna*—didn't Jamie tell you?"

"*Verna*?" Abner felt the shock go through him. *Amanita verna*—the most poisonous mushroom of them all—it was called the destroying angel and the death was an agonizing one.

Louis had hold of him now, had his arm around him. "We're going to the hospital to get your stomach pumped out, and we're going fast!" And Abner, thoroughly scared, nodded weakly.

Two months later he was dead of natural causes. And of that much, Chief Willy Wharton of Le Page County was absolutely sure.

He told Dan Moorhead, his counterpart in the next county and the next state, about it at the Right Side Bar & Grill, where they usually met after a day's work.

"So where do you come in?" Dan asked.

"Me?" Willy said. "Forgery." He bridled, as if he resented the problem it brought and his inability to smash it with a single karate blow.

"What," Dan said, "was forged?"

"This Abner Merriwell ended up with two wills having the same date, and while one of them has to be a forgery the experts disagree on which. So the D.A. dumped the whole business in my lap. Look—you knew Abner, didn't you?"

"By reputation," Dan said. "He had a big estate with a private lake stocked with game fish, which he never bothered with. His real interest was in mushrooms—wild ones—and I heard he had one named after him. *Cortinarius abnerius*."

"Sounds like Latin," Willy said. "*Abnerius*. I'd be *whartonius*. Do you think I'll ever have anything named after me?"

"Sure. Willy, Junior."

Willy leaned back and let himself dream for a few seconds. "Give us time," he said, "but I figure it'll be a girl. Girls run in Katie's family. She's got three sisters and six first cousins who are all female. And I have a couple of sisters who are twenty years older than me. Did I ever tell you about them?"

"Not yet," Dan said.

Willy pulled himself out of his reverie. "Some other time," he said. "What Abner did was to invite his heirs to stay at his place for the month of August. There were his two nephews and a married niece, along with her husband, and they all knew damn well what he was after—he even told them. The ones that loved him most would get his dough."

"People like that," Dan said, "ought to be demonetized." Then, aware that Willy seemed puzzled, Dan said quickly, "So how did things come out? You said there were two wills. Who gets what?"

"Evvy, the niece, gets half the estate under each of the wills, but Louis gets the other half under will A, and none under B. On the other hand, Jamie gets half under will B, and nothing under A. And both wills were written on the same typewriter, which was Abner's."

"Something fancy's going on," Dan said. "Tell me more about those wills, and the witnesses too—what do they say?"

"There's just one witness—Abner's cook—and she says she signed a will and saw him put it in his desk drawer. He had a big bedroom and he used one side of it as a kind of office."

"Where were the wills found?"

"In a bureau. As soon as Abner died, his nephews and the niece and her husband made a beeline for his things. They say that one of the wills was in the top bureau drawer, the other in the bottom drawer, but there was nothing in the desk."

"A man like Abner," Dan said, "with all that money to leave after he dies, doesn't usually leave his will in a bureau drawer. He had a safe

deposit box, didn't he?"

"Yeah. And no will in it."

"What about fingerprints?" Dan asked.

"Too many of them. Those four people handled both documents, and just to gum things up a few lawyers and some clerks got their hands on them too."

"Well, with Evvy getting from both wills," Dan said, "I guess she's in the clear. What's she like?"

"She's everybody's sweetheart. She's the all-American girl—full of beans and sunshine—loves life and fun and carries everybody along with her."

"O.K., but what about the others? This Louis—he was the one who took Abner to the hospital a couple of months ago, wasn't he?"

"Right, but did he do it because he was fond of the old boy or because he figured it would put him ahead in the Abner sweepstakes?"

"Maybe he was just a humanitarian," Dan said.

"I don't care what he was," Willy said. "All I'm interested in is a nice simple confession." He rubbed the hump on his nose. What he was after he usually got.

At ten the next morning Willy went to work on Evvy. She perched herself in a chair and tucked her legs underneath her skirt. Her smile wreathed her face, and she was perfectly confident that neither Willy nor anybody else in the world could resist her charm, her honesty, or the God-given dimple just to the left of her mouth.

"The three of us were brought up together," she said. "We were more like brothers and sister than cousins, and that's why I didn't marry Jamie. We talked it over and decided we were against incest. Do you think we were right?"

"Sounds like the two of you left Louis out of things," Willy remarked.

"Oh, no," she said immediately. "We wouldn't do that."

"But he's gone kind of sour, hasn't he?"

Evvy smiled cheerfully. "He was born that way, he can't help it."

"Tell me why Jamie went to Japan. To get away from you?"

"Of course not. Uncle Abner got him a job. Jamie's wonderfully stupid, and he's no good in business, so Uncle Abner sent him as far away as possible."

"Did you ever visit him in Japan?"

"If I only could have. But—"

"But what?"

"Money. Were you ever married to a high school football coach?" She laughed, and the dimple came and went. "Of course not," she said. "How could you?"

Willy spent a full hour trying to sort out her relationships with the men. She loved Jamie because he was stupid, she loved Louis because he was sour, and she loved Dirk, her husband, because what else could she do? And, although Willy squeezed her like a rag, he wasn't sure whether there was nothing to force out or whether what he got was guile. And in the final analysis, he wasn't sure whether it mattered.

But Jamie did matter. It was he who had brewed the deadly poison and apparently poured it into an expensive carafe where Abner was bound to see it and likely to taste it.

"Why," Willy asked, "did you do it?"

"For fun, mostly. And besides, I thought that if I concocted a liqueur with a new taste, Uncle Abner might finance it as a business venture."

"Did you taste your amanita thing?"

"Taste it?" Jamie said in horror. "Of course not. Do you think I wanted to kill myself? I wanted to extract the poison and keep that wonderful flavor."

"How were you going to do that?"

"Trial and error."

"Whom were you going to try it on?"

"Rats. I never did like them. Do you?"

"So you put it in an expensive carafe and left it on the sideboard in the dining room."

"What makes you think that I left it there?"

"Did you?"

"Of course not. I don't know where I left the stuff."

"Why did you put it in that carafe?"

"Did I?"

"I'm asking you why."

Jamie shrugged. "If I did, I suppose it just happened to be there and

I grabbed the first thing that was handy."

"Where did you mix this concoction?"

"In the upstairs pantry—the little one. Did you ever see that house of Uncle Abner's? I don't know how many rooms there are, I never counted them, but you can get lost there. You go up a staircase and make the wrong turn at the top and you find rooms that haven't been used in years."

"What kind of training do you have," Willy asked, "that makes you think you can develop a new liqueur?"

"None, but I could be lucky, couldn't I?"

"Such as inheriting a lot of money?"

"You bet. My parents were always broke, and they used to tell me to be nice to old Uncle Abner because he had a lot of money and might leave some of it to me. But do you know what he did when I asked him for a job? He sent me to Japan!"

"To do what?"

"I don't know. I never found out. But what a country! They trample you in the subway and honor you in their tea-houses, where they bow to you and serve you on bended knees. Except that they sit on their haunches and tuck their ankles in sideways. Ever try it?"

"So what did you do in Japan?"

"Tucked my ankles in sideways and went looking for a good old-fashioned geisha girl. And they're hard to find, Chief. Very hard."

"How did you make your amanita juice?"

"I simply cooked it up and added vodka. A great poison, Chief. It smells like ambrosia and looks like nectar. I heard that the Borgias used it."

"What did you expect to do with it?"

"Is it a crime to hope?" Jamie said.

"To hope what?"

"That Uncle Abner would drink it and I'd be there to rush him to the hospital and he'd be so grateful he'd put me in his will? My only problem was that Louis got there ahead of me."

Willy described the scene to Dan that evening over a couple of beers. "So I don't know whether Louis actually copped Jamie's act, or whether Jamie hoped Abner would drink the stuff and die."

"A pretty long chance," Dan said, "that could end up with a charge

of negligent homicide. And you figure Jamie's fairly smart, don't you?"

"The smartest of the lot. He's probably been getting by with that dumb role for years."

"Do you think Evvy is still carrying the torch for him?" Dan asked.

Willy nodded. "But I figure they're both after Abner's money, and have been all their lives. I don't think they'd let incest stand in their way—if a cousinly marriage is incest, which I don't believe but Abner must have—and they were afraid that if they went ahead and got married he'd cut them both out of his will."

"Did he ever give anybody a hint as to what the will was?"

"Well, he told all of them he had a will that only a mycologist would make. That's what got the three of them to studying mushrooms. They figured he'd leave his dough to the best mycologist."

"It makes no sense," Dan said. "What kind of a will would only a mycologist make? Was there anything in either will that related to mushrooms?"

"Not a thing," Willy said.

"Well," Dan remarked, "you've covered Jamie and Evvy. What about Louis?"

"I haven't seen him, but I had a session with Dirk late this afternoon. And if you think Evvy and Jamie are colorful, Dirk balances them off. He's strictly second balcony. He's a football coach at Hester-ville High, and all he thinks about is how he lost the state championship because he had a dumb quarterback who passed on fourth down and got intercepted. And anyhow, Dirk's not in the picture."

"As Evvy's husband he'd benefit from her inheritance, wouldn't he?"

"I guess so," Willy said. "You know that ten thousand that Katie inherited? Well, first thing she wants to do with it is buy me a push-button chair. It's supposed to be a surprise. Dan, I hate the things. What'll I do?"

"I'll fix it up," Dan said. "Just leave it to me."

Willy's craggy face beamed, broken nose and all, with the happiness of an eight-year-old getting his first bicycle. Then he looked worried. "Dan, I've got the feeling I missed out on something. A will that only a mycologist would make—what's the meaning of that?"

"I don't know any mycologists," Dan said, "but there are a couple of mushroom hunters down my way. They come from the old country and every September they go out in the woods and come back with a load

of mushrooms. I'll talk to them."

"And I'll talk to Louis," Willy said. "According to Evvy, he's a real sourpuss."

If anything, Evvy had understated the case. Louis, a dour man with a long underslung jaw, talked from the back of his throat and made dry venomous remarks that were interlarded with a kind of ugly cynicism.

"Uncle Abner should have been separated from his money bags years ago," he said. "Here were three kids, decent enough to begin with, and he regularly gave us slam-bang birthday parties complete with magic shows and fancy seven-layer cakes with enough sugar on them to make us sick. The idea was to put us on notice that he had money and one of us would get it and spend the rest of his life eating gooey cake with too much icing on it. And it worked. We got to hate each other."

"The way Evvy and Jamie tell it, they didn't exactly hate each other."

"Because they figured that if they joined forces they were pretty sure of getting the prize. Only Abner was against cousins getting married, so they didn't. You call that love?"

"You don't like them much, do you?"

"I despise them," Louis said coldly. "They're like a couple of kids trying to climb Mount Everest in bathing suits. But where they are just stupid, Abner was evil. He generated hate, and he heated it up last August when he invited the three of us to his place. And he let us know what he had in mind. I felt as if I was being rolled in filth."

"But you came," Willy said. "You rolled."

"Because I like filth."

Willy framed his next question. "If you hated Abner so much," he said, "why did you save him after he'd drunk that poison stuff?"

"I'd save my worst enemy from that kind of a death," Louis said.

"But you'd like to get half of Abner's fortune, wouldn't you?"

Louis's smile pulled his long jaw down even lower. "Wouldn't you?" he said.

Willy thought about it for the rest of the day. How far would he go to get a million or so?

He posed the question to Dan that evening at the Right Side Bar &

Grill. "If you were in their position and knew you had to cotton up to this uncle for a month or so," Willy said, "what would you do?"

"I'd tell him to go to hell," Dan said. "And so would you."

Willy supposed that maybe he would, and he stopped thinking about it. "Look," he said, "I'm just a guy trying to do a job. So here's Jamie cooking up a poison and leaving it around so that Abner will pick it up and try it. The D.A. ought to get a case of negligent homicide out of it, but that can come later. Right now my gut says that mushrooms are the key to the whole business. A will that only a mycologist would make—that's it. Simple, direct. All I've got to do is figure it out."

In a way, Katie figured it out for him. When he told her about Dan's friends who went mushroom hunting, she got excited and picked a bunch of mushrooms in the field behind the house. She stuck them in plastic bags, a different kind in each bag, and showed them to Willy that evening.

"I'm going to bring them to Dan's Italian friends and find out if they're any good," she said.

"Make them eat them first," Willy said. "That's the only way of being sure. Let's see the stuff."

The bags were in the kitchen and the mushrooms seemed to be on the tired side, except for one of the bags that contained nothing but a black liquid.

"That's strange," Katie said. "I know I put mushrooms in there, and now look."

Willy nodded. "Looks like ink," he said. Then he let out a whoop and repeated the word. "Ink!" he said. "Let's have a try. Got a pen? I'll see if I can write something that looks like ordinary ink."

Which it did.

The next morning Willy got some expert advice from the owner of Giuseppi's Pizza Parlor, admittedly the best pizza place in town.

Giuseppi, who was John Farini in private life, was delighted to come to Willy's office in the morning. A smiling squat man with black hair pasted flat over his skull, he was a storehouse of information about himself and about mushrooms and about anything else you wanted to ask him.

"My folks come from the old country," he said, "and they know all

about mushrooms. They brought me up on them. The best mushrooms in the world are the wild ones. But people would be scared to death if I used them on a pizza. They hear about poisonous mushrooms and they think every kind is liable to kill you."

"So what about this ink?" Willy said.

"First off," Farini said, "you never put mushrooms in a plastic bag. Mushrooms got to breathe. The ones you got there died from lack of air—turned to water."

"What kind are they?"

"I don't know the scientific names," Farini said, "but we call them inky caps, and you can see why."

"Ever hear of inky cap juice being used for ink?"

"Why not?" Farini said. "Every once in a while something happens I never heard of, like ink from a mushroom. But why not?"

Willy was a little late getting to the Right Side Bar & Grill that evening, but when he joined Dan he was exuding cheerfulness.

"You look pleased," Dan said. "What happened?"

"Katie happened," Willy said, settling back on the bench. "She picked some mushrooms, and if she'd known enough to put them in a paper bag instead of a plastic bag the case would still be wide open. You see, the spores of this particular mushroom are black and they make a black inklike substance if they can't breathe. All the lab man had to do was look at the two signatures under a microscope and see the mushroom spores."

"That's what Abner must have meant about a will that only a mycologist could make. But which one was signed with this stuff?"

"Both of them," Willy said.

"Then what are you looking so happy about?"

Willy smiled like a bionic angel. "The D.A. asked me to find out which was a forgery, didn't he? I went him one better. They're both forgeries, they're tracings of the signatures of Abner and his cook."

"The forgeries on the two wills are identical? Is that what you're saying?"

"Right. I haven't found out what they were copied from, but you know as well as I do that you don't need to have any original. What I saw under the microscope was classic, because those signatures sure were traced. The slow, uneven lines with fuzzy edges, the trembling

here and there, and a couple of places where the forger lifted up his pen and then put it down again. No question about it, Dan."

"Then Abner left no valid will and he died intestate and the nephews and the niece divide equally."

Willy ran his middle finger along the hump of his nose and nodded.

"That's justice for you, isn't it?"

"But how did any of them find out about the ink?"

"Pages 163 and 164 of a book called *Romance of the Fungus World*. They all read it. It even told them how to make the ink, so they must have guessed what Abner had in mind."

"Any proof who did the actual forging?"

"Well, you know what happens when you get somebody backed up in a corner and he thinks you have the evidence on him? I had enough on all three of them to scare them honest, and they came up independently with the same story about the amanita liqueur. Jamie brewed it, but that's as far as he went, and he committed no crime. But Dirk found the carafe and filled it with amanita juice and brought it down to the dining room, where he put it on the sideboard. Then he sent Abner into the room. It was like putting a bomb in a driveway and hoping somebody would drive over it and set it off, so Dirk's getting charged with attempted manslaughter, second degree."

"Then the experts were right," Dan said. "They spotted the forgeries. It stands to reason that Jamie forged the signature on the will that gave him half and cut Louis off completely, and that Louis forged the other one."

"Still," Willy said, "that doesn't explain why Dirk wanted to kill Abner."

"Money," Dan said promptly. "The will that the cook witnessed and is missing must have left everything to Evvy. Dirk apparently found it and tried to kill Abner before he could change his mind. And that's that, except—you look worried about something."

"That push-button chair," Willy said. "You promised to do something about it."

"I did. I talked it over with Katie, only she'd bought it already. The best and most expensive on the market—but, Willy, I took it off her hands." Dan beamed with satisfaction at Willy's obvious gratitude, and then added softly, as if the matter was hardly worth mentioning, "At half price."

He was determined to be mad . . .

GETTING OUT

by
BARRY
N.
MALZBERG



So they put me on temporary hold in the Institute after all. Assault or threatened assault with a deadly weapon is serious business; according to all of their readings I am quite sane and incapable of murder and accidents will happen. The Smith & Wesson point thirty-eight caliber is a notoriously uncertain weapon which has a habit, in unskilled hands, of going off unpredictably. I am assigned a small cubicle, given fresh linens, and left to my own devices for several hours or days—it is

hard to determine which what with meals being slipped through the transom and lavatory obligations being handled imperceptibly—but after a while a supervisor comes into my room for an interview, his face confused. “You are making matters very difficult for us,” he says:

“I’m sorry about that.”

“We believe you to be sane. But you did commit a highly unstable act with the potential for tragedy.”

“I meant to do it,” I say pleasantly. I curl my toes. “The floor is nice and warm here,” I say. “My feet are at peace.”

“We are not interested in your feet,” the supervisor says, “we are interested in your adaptability and potential for social control, both of which were rated highly. Still, it is puzzling.”

“Why don’t you think about it for a while?” I say. “Weigh alternatives, give everything the benefit of the doubt. Take thirty years if you will.”

“You are a valuable social resource, a presumptive sane person. We cannot keep you, really, for thirty hours. Nonetheless, it is very confusing. Why don’t you accept your obligations? Why don’t you accept the reality of the situation and succumb to it?”

“Because I’m mad,” I say. “I attempted to attack my wife, my mistress, and several Institute personnel with an antique Smith and Wesson point thirty-eight caliber. I could hardly be at large.”

“I don’t know,” the supervisor says. “You are certainly very *determined* to be mad; I will give you that.”

More tests are run. Basal metabolism, identity referent, the projective series. Apparently they’re willing to take a second look. My wife drops by and tells me through the transom that I am monstrous and that several decisions have to be made on expiring magazine subscriptions and what services I can volunteer to the Parent Teacher Association annual folk night. My mistress pays me a call and leaves a note saying that she still finds me adorable although, of course, I remain a monster. For five minutes last week she thought her feeling was gone but it apparently was not. My daughters send me chocolates with a wistful note inveighing for a slight rise in allowances. In the dayroom to which I am now forcibly escorted once a day I participate with the lunatics in checker games, chess games, Ping-Pong, and arguments over television programming. Egg-yolk stains on the institutional bath-

robe provide me glow like the sunrise. My wife brings me some fresh clothing from home and my fellow incarcerates point out how devoted she is.

The supervisor slaps the folder down on his desk with a gesture of disgust and says, "We have gone far beyond all of our prerogatives in running tests on you. You have cost us enormous time and effort for nothing. You are completely sane. You are being discharged in the morning."

"I'm crazy," I say. "I played four games of phantom chess yesterday afternoon and won them all. My mistress calls me a monster. My wife doesn't understand my fetish for dirty bathrobes. You can't let a man such as this out into the world."

"You are fully self-maintaining."

"I'm unable to work. How am I supposed to go back to the agency?"

"You will be able to work," the supervisor says. "You will be able to do everything just as always. Your desk is waiting for you and everything has been smoothed over, explained as a minor breakdown in perception because of poor diet. Besides, you are needed desperately at the agency; six of its personnel were committed last week."

"My wife thinks I'm a monster too," I say.

"Wives don't count," the supervisor says. He shrugs. "Mistresses don't count either. Nothing counts and you'd better suck into that, Mister." A little glimmer of pain crosses his face and his hands tremble.

"At least I'm able to come here eight hours a day and *play* at being inside," he says confidentially.

I return to the world, leaving my sunrise bathrobe for the phantom chess team.

I return to my office where all is as it was except for six new faces at the desks of those who have broken down. I cancel my subscription to a newsweekly, renew two women's magazines, extend *Jack and Jill*, but void *Humpty Dumpty* since my daughters are relatively mature. I volunteer my services as musician and performer for PTA folk night. In bed at night I listen to the even breathing of my wife—small purrs in the darkness that whisper *you're sane, you're sane*.

I resolve to cut things off with my mistress but she takes to showing

up outside the building in which I work at lunchtime and quitting time and giving me sorrowful glances. Reproachful notes, promising passion, arrive in the office mail. A box of chocolates arrives at my desk. A clean bathrobe with a love note comes parcel post. I call her at midnight from Wonder Waffles and arrange a tryst for the following afternoon. One must, after all, accept one's fate. The supervisor is perhaps getting through; I will try.

My mistress and I enjoy high passion once again in the Jungle City Reservoir Motel & Day Rates. "It has never been like this before," she sighs. I agree. At that moment I reach a decision in my sanity: I will abandon my wife and children and run off with her.

"I am abandoning you and the kiddies to go off with my mistress," I tell my wife at the PTA Folk Festival the following Thursday, holding my violin crookedly and at an off angle. "What she gives me you and I have lost or never had. You must understand that I am entirely sane by two examinations and that this is part of the process of enacting my sanity. I must fulfill my life as do all the sane."

"You shouldn't have cancelled *Humpty Dumpty*," she says. "There was lots of material to cut out and make into little patterns."

My tryst with my mistress is at noon the following day. I will meet her outside the typing pool and discreetly slip away with her. Having renewed the subscription to *Humpty Dumpty* and bade my wife farewell in the morning I come to the office to do a good morning's work before my flight and fulfillment, but to my great surprise I see at the entrance to the typing pool the supervisor and three attendants with grapples, waiting for me.

The supervisor's eyes are alight with purpose. "All right," he says. "We have your final report."

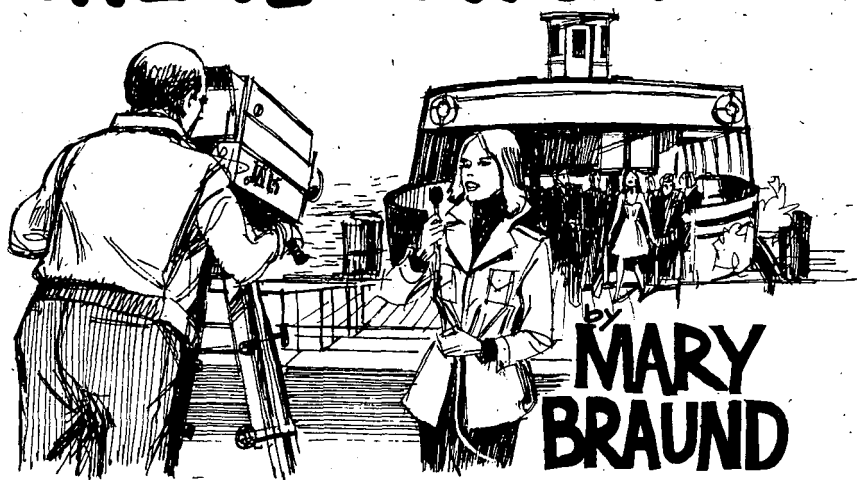
"I'm going to fulfill myself."

"You finally made it," he says and signals to the attendants.

And *pace Domini* they take me away.

The woman was everywhere. . .

THE WOMAN IN THE YELLOW DRESS



As far as anyone could recollect, it started with a very routine assignment. That was the first time any of them could remember seeing the woman in the yellow dress.

Guy Roberts, the news director, supposed afterwards that it had been he who had begun it, although he did not understand why.

He had sent the camera crew down to film the ferries for no particular reason. News had been light that day, the sun shining, the

Olympic Mountains saw-toothed across Puget Sound, the water smooth, silky, and tempting, the last of the snow on the mountains brilliant against the forget-me-not blue of the Northwest skies. It had been the first day of summer—that was it.

“Get your butts out of here,” Guy had told them. “You’re standing around breathing precious air. Get out and film the first day of summer for the faithful masses.”

He didn’t care what it was, he had told them—the ferries would do as well as anything. So Bill Heavley, the cameraman, and Sandie San-son, the news reporter, took themselves down to the waterfront. They shot a hundred feet of film that could be cut down to two minutes as a filler for the six o’clock news. The white-and-green state ferries were a favorite subject for cameramen—instantly photogenic, eminently symbolic of Washington State and of summer—they churned the dark waters of the dockside into a frothing mint-green milkshake of promised summer fun.

The ramp dropped and the ferry disgorged the passengers, who were scurrying out of the cavern of the boat ahead of the automobiles, and Bill aimed his camera at the water, the mountains, the passengers, and the pot-bellied ship. He was bored. He must have done the same thing a hundred times before. Sandie did a voice-over commentary, extolling the weather, the mountains, the water, and the boats. She tried to get some zip into the commentary, but it was difficult. She too was bored. It wasn’t exactly the earth-shattering event she had imagined herself commentating on when she went into TV journalism.

Bill’s eye, however bored, was automatically good. His camera picked out faces of people, color, and images. The boarding passengers, maybe a dozen, were nothing special—a young Viking surmounted by an enormous rucksack, a girl pushing a baby stroller, an old man with a brown paper bag under his arm, and the woman in the yellow dress. There was nothing extraordinary about her, just the splash of daffodil yellow against the blue sky, the green-and-white boats, the black barnacle-encrusted pilings of the ferry-boat dock. It was photogenic.

When they trailed back to the TV station Bill ran the film through the developer and edited it down to two minutes. The viewing room was even deeper and darker than the rest of the building and the touch of yellow from the woman’s dress was a shaft of sunlight in the gloom.

They ran the piece on the six o'clock news and again at eleven. The day's news was humdrum and Phil Bentley, the anchorman, complained that Bill had cut the film down too much.

"Another thirty seconds of film," he said, "and I wouldn't have had to waffle on for so long with Sandie." Sandie didn't particularly appeal to Phil.

Two days later, on Saturday, there was a spectacular fire at the foot of Grayson. The fire had smoldered all night and at about nine o'clock in the morning it burst into a towering sheet of flame against the downtown skyscrapers. The police, the fire department, TV reporters, and spectators rushed to gawk at the unseasonable fireworks. Channel Three sent its weekend crew to film the conflagration. It was good photogenic stuff.

The cameraperson that day was Jill Spenser. Jill was Channel Three's token woman on the technical crew. Guy didn't think too much of her abilities, but affirmative action, and the fact that she was the station manager's niece, persuaded him to go along with hiring her. He could always edit her work out of sight. But it was good that day and, in any case, he was off that weekend, so Jill's footage passed into the midday news flash just as she had spliced it herself.

One of the viewers phoned in to say that the woman in the yellow dress who had been in the ferry-boat shot was at the scene of the fire. The weekend phone operator jotted the comment down on her pad and passed it along to the station manager's office with all the other comments, as usual. The comments were filed, as FCC regulations required, under "Viewer Response."

Tuesday night the local baseball team was playing at home and the crew went out to film the action. Ball games were usually given to Griff Ellis. Griff had played third base in college and TV camerawork was very secondary to his estimation of life's worth. He had a wonderful eye for the game and somehow knew instinctively when a big hit was coming up, and always had the camera rolling at the right moment, wasting very little footage. So when the pinch hitter grounded the ball deep into the outfield, sending the second and third basemen home for the winning run, Griff of course had the shot and the crowd wildly erupting with joy.

"Why?" asked the same observant viewer, "did Channel Three keep taking shots of the woman in the yellow dress? Is it a publicity stunt or is she the station manager's wife?"

"What the hell," demanded the station manager, "is this woman-in-yellow-dress business?"

The station manager was really too occupied at the moment to deal with viewer comment. He was busy with his latest series of editorials—anti-abortion, anti-homosexual rights, anti-ERA—he did the same four-minute spot twice a day, in which he earnestly appealed "to the good sense of the American people to keep this country great."

He and Guy descended with the news team to the viewing room and ran the film back through the editor. There went the crowd, exultantly on its feet with arms upraised, and in the throng—bright against the checked shirts and blue jeans—sitting quietly, was the woman in the yellow dress.

"Garbage," the station manager pronounced. "Just another woman. These viewers have fleas for brains."

Contrary to what he stated in his editorials, the station manager did not have a high opinion of the viewers. As much as he could, he ignored the phone calls and the letters unless they happened to coincide with his own firmly held opinions. However, he did peruse the weekly ratings very carefully, regarding them as a kind of Bible. Publicly deploring violence, he eagerly ran the five most violent shows on television. As he and Guy agreed, the ratings were all important.

Summer, fickle as ever in the Northwest, always produced material for the kind of photography at which Bill excelled and with which the news team could run a bright little tune at the end of the day's news. One day the temperature soared into the eighties and Bill was down at Golden Gardens, the local sunning spot, lingering his camera lovingly on the glistening bikinied young girls. The day after, black clouds rolled in from the Pacific and Bill had a nice little piece with dripping disconsolate tourists at the Center, flags drooping in the Flag Plaza, and the International Fountain eclipsed by nature's own waterworks.

On each film the woman in the yellow dress appeared. At the beach, she sat with her back against a sea-bleached log, her face upturned to the sun. At the Center, she huddled in the lee of an overhang, shivering in the dank air.

Bill didn't seem to have noticed her. He hadn't been present when they had checked the film from the ball game, but the others jumped on it immediately. Stringing the program together for the six o'clock edition of the news, Phil and Guy spotted the splash of yellow at once. They cut her from the beach scene without consulting Bill. They didn't want any more phone calls.

But when she was in the piece from the Center the very next day, the station manager heard about it and blew up.

"What the hell are you doing?" he rasped at Bill. "Taking pictures of some woman you got the hots for? Does she go round with you everywhere?"

Bill and the station manager stared coldly at one another. Bill didn't like him. The station manager didn't care whether Bill liked him or not.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Bill said.

For his benefit they ran the film through the editor, frame by frame. "She sure looks familiar," Bill said. "But you can't really tell what she looks like. You can just see a yellow dress. She's only in the background."

"Yeah, like she was yesterday and the day at the ferry." The station manager, who was trying to give up smoking, chewed furiously on a grey wad of gum.

"So?" Bill grinned and shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe it's some dame who's taken a fancy to me."

The station manager looked at him with distaste. Bill was fifty if he was a day, bald as a moon, and had a fat wife and six kids.

Jill, who was in the viewing room too, disagreed.

"No," she said, "in spite of your inestimable charms, Bill, she was at my fire."

"And at Griff's ball game," Phil pointed out.

"Aw," said Bill, "you mean she's not just my woman?"

They pulled the tapes and ran them again. If it wasn't the same woman, it was certainly the same dress. The dress had a fluorescent quality to it as though sunshine lingered on it. It was sleeveless with a flared skirt—unmistakable. But the woman herself was fuzzy, out of focus, or too distant from the camera to get her features. It was even difficult to judge her age. She looked like any other woman—neither too short nor too tall, neither too heavy nor too thin. She was not old,

not young—just a woman in a yellow dress.

Phil was staring at the editor. "Funny," he said, "I've got the feeling I've seen her somewhere before."

The station manager snapped his gum. "There isn't a woman in this state you haven't seen before, but usually without her clothes-on."

Phil didn't take the remark as anything but a compliment. He was proud of his achievement with women. Dark and almost too good-looking, with a rich warm voice and a flashing smile that cost the station dear in salary, he had no trouble finding willing bed partners.

"No woman," remarked Jill thoughtfully, "wears the same dress for a week—day in and day out, in sunshine and in rain." She paused, wondering. "Why doesn't she have a coat on at the Center?"

The station manager frowned as he flipped off the viewing box. He wasn't going to tell anyone that the woman reminded him, God forbid, of his first wife. If there was one woman he wanted to forget, it was his first wife.

"It's just nonsense," he grumbled uneasily to himself and then he glared from the crew to Guy. "But don't let me see her on another shot or I'll wrap your cameras around your necks and fire the lot of you."

Griff was not in on the meeting. He was down at the Courthouse filming a demonstration for gay rights. There was a sense of outrage among the news team when he returned with a film complete with placards, chanting marchers, and the woman in the yellow dress. She was not a marcher, just an innocent bystander—once again in the background, once again identifiable only by her dress.

The word spread around the station. The floor directors, technicians, traffic personnel, secretaries, and sundry other employees—unified only by their animosity to the station manager—tittered behind their hands. They knew the news team was playing some kind of joke on him.

The camera crew gathered together, scratched their heads, and ran the films through yet again. The only piece missing was the one cut out of the beach scene, which had been dropped on the floor and swept away by the janitors. Puzzled, they stared compulsively at the woman.

None of them could remember having been aware of her. Even Bill,

who had aimed his camera at her down at the ferries, could not really recall seeing her. "Hell, you know how it is," he said. "You just take pictures, you don't really *see* anybody."

That was right, they agreed. None of them really saw anything. They just took pictures.

The station manager tore at what was left of his hair in the best theatrical tradition, swore, smoked his first cigarette in weeks, and took his complaint to Guy. "It's some sort of persecution," he yelled, thumping his hand on the news director's desk.

Guy was of a more phlegmatic disposition. "You're imagining things," he said. "We've just got some kook who likes to be on TV. This city is full of kooks. Don't let it get to you."

"How the devil does she know where the cameras are going to be; tell me that? How come she's always around when our crew is shooting?"

Guy shrugged. Why did it bother the station manager so much, he inquired.

The station manager mopped his brow. "Guy," he said, "don't laugh at me, but that woman looks like my first wife. It's uncanny. Every time I see her I sweat. Don't you have any woman in your life that you never want to set eyes on again?"

Guy laughed. "No," he said. "Women don't bother me that much. Just tell the cameras to keep away from her."

"But I told them—you were there—and then Griff walked in with another shot of her."

"Well, tell 'em again, and—" he patted the station manager comfortingly on the shoulder—"you know you're just imagining about your wife. After all, she's been dead for years."

It became a kind of a game then. The whole station joined in. The cameras and reporters went out, looked around carefully for the woman in yellow, checking that she was nowhere in sight, set up their positions with caution, shot their footage, and then hurried back to the station to run the film through the editor. People who had no business in the viewing room crowded in, watching intently as the frames flicked through the machine.

And, incredibly, she always appeared—just out of focus, just beyond recognition.

"Have you noticed," Guy said, "she's getting closer?—Soon we'll have her face."

"She's haunting us," Jill whispered.

The whisper spread through the station.

The station manager became obsessed. He watched the other channels for signs of her, but she never appeared on anyone else's coverage. At the airport, with all the stations jostling for position to get a word from the Junior Senator of the state, only Channel Three came up with the mysterious woman: At the race track, at the scene of a bloody car crash, at a bank robbery, it was the same story. Somehow only Channel Three's cameras caught the elusive yellow phantom.

It ceased to be a joke. The station manager's obsession enveloped the station. The camera crew's fingers froze on the triggers. The reporters grew furtive, their eyes flicking on camera; they stumbled while presenting their reports to the unseen audience.

Guy fired Sandie. She made a mess of a perfectly ordinary story about a fashion show, describing all the clothes as yellow, correcting herself, and finally choking up completely. It wouldn't have mattered so much if the program had not been going out live.

At the usual Monday morning meeting of department heads, Guy suggested a pragmatic approach. He stilled the tense, apprehensive, and foul-mouthed arguments with a calm upraised hand and the memorable phrase, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. Or," he elaborated, "if we can't get rid of her, let's bring her in. Let's find out who she is. Let us—" and he paused portentously—"appeal to the viewers. Show those shots. Someone out there must know who she is. Ask the viewers for identification. It should have great promotional appeal."

They stopped to digest his words. A publicity stunt! Yes, that would grab them! Run the woman in the yellow dress again and again. They certainly had enough shots of her. They would stop hiding from her and turn the problem over to the viewers. Appealing to the viewers would be a new approach for Channel Three.

It seemed like a great idea. Phil kicked it off in his own inimitable style. On the six o'clock news and again at eleven, he oozed into the studio camera from a carefully prepared script. "Here we have," he said with a smile, "a mysterious lady who is intriguing Channel Three

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by her ubiquity—" it was a daringly big word, so he expanded for the benefit of the not-so-literate viewers "—by apparently appearing everywhere at the same time. If there is any one of our viewers who knows who this lady is, Channel Three would be grateful to hear from you. All replies will be treated in the strictest confidence." The announcement was followed by clips of the woman in the yellow dress.

There had been a hot discussion as to whether to offer a prize. The station manager had wanted to offer a two weeks' paid vacation in Hawaii for the correct identification, but Guy had vetoed that. "Every weirdo in the world will call. Don't offer a prize."

The response was overwhelming. Letters and phone calls poured into the station. They had to hire extra personnel to deal with the mail. But if the answer was there, it was buried beneath the weight of the response. "We all know they're mad out there," Guy groaned, "but this is ridiculous."

"My dear dead mother, in her grave these last twenty years," a crabbed hand wrote.

"My wife—" this was from an irate caller "—who left me with four kids and a cleaned-out bank account."

"My sister. We thought she was murdered. Her body was never found."

"Our daughter, who ran away from home. It's been five years."

"Janis Joplin."

"Greta Garbo."

"My ex-girl friend, who got hooked on heroin."

"Our office manager—cleared off with thirty thousand dollars."

"Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis."

"Martha Mitchell."

"My wife. She said she was visiting relatives in New York."

The FBI called in person. "She's a woman we want to question in connection with a bombing incident." They insisted on copies of the films.

And so on and so forth.

"She's every damn woman who ever existed," Guy despaired. "Those people out there see just what they want to see."

Phil came to him with his resignation. He had a better offer from a station in Indiana, he said, then suddenly blurted out, "I can't stand

the sight of that woman any more. She looks just like a girl I dated a while back. I think she went off for an abortion. I never saw her again, not until now."

Guy stared at him. "How long ago?" he asked with curiosity.

"Well, in high school, as a matter of fact," Phil muttered, his too-handsome face flushing. "Before I knew the ropes, Guy."

"You're nuts," Guy said, but could not persuade him to stay.

Bill was apologetic. "My wife is convinced she's the dame I used to go with before we were married. You know what wives are like, Guy, they get an idea in their heads and nothing will shift it. She's been angling to live in California anyway."

"Listen," said Guy, "what's with you all? You're all seeing someone who isn't there, she's spooking you out. She's just a woman who gets in the way of the cameras, that's all. Nothing more. She's not out of your pasts, how can she be? She can't possibly be out of everyone's past."

"You're right, of course." Bill looked remarkably unconvinced. "But we've got this feeling about her. Jill thinks she haunts our cameras. If we take our cameras away, maybe she'll go away too."

"You mean—" and it took a moment for it to sink into Guy's incredulous mind—"you mean the others are thinking of going too?"

Bill nodded silently, embarrassed.

Guy charged out of his office and found Jill. She tossed her long blonde hair defiantly. "You're making such a fuss about that woman. You're nothing but a bunch of damned chauvinists. Serves you right if a woman drives you out of your tiny minds." Then her lower lip quivered and tears spilled over her thick lashes. "She looks just like my mother," she wailed, "and I treated her rotten."

Guy faced Griff, the last of the camera crew. "I'm going to Mexico," Griff said. "I got an offer from a baseball team down there. That's all I ever wanted to do—play ball—and anyway, man, I don't like the way white middle-class women dominate TV here."

"Mad," exclaimed Guy. "You're all mad."

Four local sponsors took their trade elsewhere. They didn't like the way Channel Three exploited their daughters, their wives, their secretaries.

The station manager had a heart attack. It killed him looking day after day at the image of his first wife.

Loss of profits, sponsors and personnel attrition plunged the station into financial crisis. Guy hung on. He was an old pro, too valuable to be dispensed with, too tough to crack under the pressures. There was a hint that he might become the station manager under the new ownership. He was there at the meeting of the board.

"Problems," the chief accountant said gloomily. "I can't understand what happened to the station. We were doing so well, everything was going so swimmingly. We're lucky that we were bailed out at the last minute."

The new owner was a newspaper magnate from San Francisco. "Do we get to meet him today?" Guy asked.

The accountant cleared his throat. "Unfortunately," he said, "the gentleman in question has suffered a stroke and won't be able to take up the reins of the company. However, power of attorney has been granted to his wife, and the lady, I'm glad to say, expresses a strong interest in this new venture of her husband's. She hasn't been here in the city before, but she's looking forward to getting to know the station. She'll join us very shortly." He glanced at his watch. "Her plane landed half an hour ago."

Guy experienced a distinct sinking feeling. As the men rose when the new owner was announced, and she entered through the large double mahogany doors, he reluctantly raised his eyes from the profit-and-loss accounts, the ratings, the financial statements, and the accountants' records.

He had said it to the others. She was not a figure out of the past. Very much in focus now, she sat herself gracefully in her yellow dress at the head of the table and looked straight into Guy's eyes.

"Please," she said, "just regard me as an ordinary viewer."



Barry made a simple living by stealing a thing or two . . .

SECOND STORY MAN

by
JEFFRY
SCOTT



Barry was sixty feet up the side of the hotel when the balding man opened the window.

This was embarrassing and, more to the point, potentially nasty. Barry had one hand on the windowsill at the time, while the other gripped a drainpipe, and his toes were wedged into chinks of brickwork. City breezes, stirring his cascade of corkscrew curls, helped to conceal sweat that hadn't been present an instant earlier. He

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grinned feebly.

But the man *was* balding and that made it better somehow. Gloriously hirsute, young Barry tended to discount anybody whose hairline started well above the eyebrows. "Aerial installer," Barry croaked. "I install TV aerials."

"Don't we use ladders any more?" the man inquired interestedly. He settled himself on the windowseat with the air of one ready for conversation. Pain began traversing Barry's leg muscles and his fingers were beginning to ache.

"I wouldn't trust you to install your finger in your ear without an anatomical chart," his new companion remarked. "No, my friend, you are what used to be known as a cat burglar. Or in your case, kitten burglar."

The man stood up suddenly and stepped back. "You'd better come in."

Barry looked at the gun the man was holding and nearly lost his grip. In some ways his life had been sheltered—not counting TV and movies—and he'd never seen a gun close-up.

It was a self-loading pistol, not that Barry recognized it as such, with an ugly box magazine in front of the triggerguard. Barry found himself inside the room without being conscious of obeying the man's implied order.

"Shut the window and sit down." The man seemed to be in the habit of running things. "My name and business are my business, and you're a thief. That's how things stand."

Barry nodded automatically. That abundance of square, polished forehead and the sleepy blue eyes were no longer reassuring. He hadn't realized that guns had such dark, disturbingly projective holes that followed a person without actually moving, like the Mona Lisa's gaze.

The remains of half a dozen miniature cigars lay spoked around the rim of a pottery ashtray at the bald man's elbow, and Barry surmised he had been in the room for some time. Yet the place didn't look occupied—no luggage, no packages, not so much as a newspaper lying around. It was obvious that the man was intent on leaving no imprint of himself apart from the dead cigars.

"Pay attention, Barry," he chided, clicking his tongue when the lad blushed fiercely. "Never go to work in a jeans-jacket with your real

name embroidered on the pocket."

"I borrowed it from a mate," Barry offered.

The man did the tongue-clicking thing again. "You climb passably—for an amateur. But you think far too slowly. Therefore, you will climb and I will do the thinking."

"That's all very well, Mister, but—"

"Good, we agree—it augers well," said the man, deliberately misunderstanding. His manner changed. "Where were you heading when I caught you?"

Barry told the truth. "Anywhere up top. My idea was to get in, maybe force a few doors. All you tourists got cameras, radios, stuff like that."

"A hotel thief." The man nodded. "But why in the world risk your neck entering the hard way?" Barry didn't notice that the question was put in the tone that hints an answer is already known.

"Security," he explained laconically. "Because of the terrorist scares and all that. They're watching any hotel within twenty miles of the airport like flippin' hawks. And not just the hotel blokes, the police as well—especially cheaper places like this. This is the sort of place where your Arab maniacs hide out, see."

"It's got so that you can't just walk in or sneak through the staff entries, like the old days. They never check you walking out, but they'll give you a hard time getting in."

The man cursed softly. That, and his speech earlier, which was as accentless as a speak-your-weight machine, made Barry blurt out, "Here, you're a foreigner!"

"Perspicacious," the man commented abstractedly, then he smiled, surprisingly sweetly. "A stupid foreigner, Barry. I have used this hotel on three previous occasions because it seemed ideal—busy, slipshod, uncaring. I'd forgotten about the terrorists."

Now the man was talking to himself. The pistol was unwavering. "Yes, that must be it. They saw me signing in."

"You speak good English, Mister—almost as good as me." No harm in currying favor.

"Considerably better, I trust." The man snapped out of his partial reverie. His blue eyes weighed and measured Barry, who found this almost as disconcerting as the staring hole of the pistol.

"Nobody saw you come in, nobody knows you are here."

The words cut like steel, and Barry flinched. "Don't kill me, Mister!"

The man cursed again, disgustedly. "Of course not; you stupid boy. Unless you compel me to do it. Where's the profit in killing you? Be quiet and let me—what's the phrase?—figure the odds."

It was quiet on the sixth floor of the Queen Caroline Hotel. Water pipes rumbling, the aged floor creaking, and the balding man's thoughtful rocking registered separately and distinctly on Barry's ears. The traffic noise was no louder than the blood pounding in his ears. Barry, who had never heard of Dr. Johnson, far less read him, would have applauded the lexicographer's theory that imminent peril concentrates a man's mind wonderfully. He noticed that the man's eyes narrowed whenever the elevator whined at the end of the corridor.

"Luck," the man observed abruptly. "My luck has always been excellent. Even when it's bad, it's good."

Barry hardly heard him. For all his airs, the man was a crook. And for some reason he was trapped in this crummy room at the Queen Caroline. He dared not leave, even though he feared that somebody—the law, probably—would come up and collect him pretty soon.

"Tough. You got sussed when you booked in, eh? That shouldn't cause you much trouble. You can still get away if you run for it. They only check you coming in, not leaving."

"Shut up," the man commanded. "Sussed? That must be slang. Somebody took too much interest in me while I was signing the register, yes. To walk straight out then, with my luggage, would be fatal, a clear admission. And I sensed that they were marginally uncertain. The only thing for me to do was to act normally and come up here."

He moved to the door. "Go to the bed, reach underneath, take what you find there, and lay it on the bed—without heroics."

Barry looked at the briefcase he had placed on the bedspread. It was nothing impressive, made of leather that was cracked and scuffed, though sound. It seemed to have been kept under something heavy or compressed somehow for a long while—the sides were deeply furrowed. And it had a funny smell, unless it was his imagination.

Oh God, Barry thought, it was explosives, plastic explosives—they were supposed to smell funny. It was a bloody bomb. This crazy bald man had come to the Queen Caroline to leave a bomb in somebody's room—

"It won't bite you," the man called from beside the door. No, Barry thought, just blow me to bits.

As he opened his mouth to speak, the man started talking again.

"Tell me once more that they do not check outgoing traffic, and I may kill you after all. This much I saw before the lift doors closed—one man was hurrying to the phones and his partner was using a two-way radio. So one phoned for orders and the other made sure all exits were sealed."

The gun made an orchestra conductor's dip. "Not even a stalemate—very soon they will remove me from the board." It did not come out resignedly. The balding man was excited, with an excitement that was suppressed and channeled.

"Unless—" he added musingly and hefted the pistol, making Barry's heart sink. "It was luck," he said, "making me look out of a window at an airwell—what sane man admires an airwell? And there you were. Go to the bed."

"Huh?" Barry backed off.

The man tugged something on one side of the gun, making it snap metallically. He gripped the pistol with both hands, extending it breast high.

"All right," Barry whimpered, turning back to the bed. "All right!" The man laughed tightly. "Good. Now take the cover from the pillow and tear it into two long strips. You have a clasp-knife in the hip pocket of your jeans, I saw the outline. Cut the pillowcase with that, then put the knife on the floor and kick it away."

Barry's hands trembled. The briefcase emanated a musty chemical odor that might have been diesel fuel, though he doubted it. He was sobbing quietly, unknowingly.

Then his panic cleared as suddenly as it had gripped him, leaving him feverishly observant. He noticed that like many European briefcases, this one had unobtrusive gunmetal rings fixed by leather tabs to its four corners. He could predict why he was tearing the linen strips—to improvise straps to make the case into a backpack.

"Tie the strips to the rings with good knots. Let me see you tug each one when it's knotted. Good—now put it on." Barry started shaking again. He shrank from simply handling the case, and even more so from wearing the infernal thing. But the gun was an equally potent threat.

The man watched in silence. "Good," he repeated. "Now you do

what you came here for—climb! Just go one floor up to the room above this one.” The man opened a door in one wall. “Open the closet like this one in the room upstairs. There is a hook on the back of the door for topcoats.” Swinging the door back, he pointed at it with the pistol muzzle. “Hang the case on that hook, shut the door, and take the stairs down here again. Then I will pay you—well, we’ll see—at least one hundred pounds sterling.”

He waited, then said sharply, “Is it nothing to you, a hundred pounds?”

Barry was thinking that terrorists were liable to fearful sentences—12, 23, 30 years at a time. If the police caught him planting a bomb, it would be futile to claim that he was only a messenger sent at gunpoint. And that assumed he would reach the room in one piece. If the thing blew up—

Getting shot, or blown to bits, or sent inside for a lifetime was no bet. No bet at all. “Make it five hundred,” he bargained, playing for time.

“That’s nonsense. Climb quickly. And don’t try to go into business for yourself. I’ll watch until you get inside that room. The stairs from that floor go past here so I can open my door a crack and cover them. If you have not come down from there with empty hands in two minutes, I’ll come after you.”

“I’ve got no choice then,” Barry lied, trying to sound sullen and defeated, which was close enough the truth to be easy.

He could feel the briefcase heavy on his back as he crossed to the window and opened it and scrambled out onto the sill.

His hand on the drainpipe, a toe into the aged brickwork, he started up the outside wall. Reach, haul, new foothold, rest. Barry wiped his brow, craning over his shoulder to watch the man below, who was halfway out of the window, his right hand buried inside his jacket—ready, watchful.

Now the top of Barry’s head was level with the next set of windows. He jammed his left hand between the wall and brickwork, pretending to work at the window, gambling that the man couldn’t see his right hand inching the razor blade out of his pocket.

He cut one of the linen straps easily and hacked at the other until the weight left his back.

Barry dropped the razor blade and, clinging to the drainpipe, risked a

downward glance. The briefcase, growing smaller by the second, was hurtling down toward the concrete floor of the airwell. Something was falling with it—the case had knocked the pistol from the bald man's hand. Barry turned his face to the bricks, his muscles aching, wanting the detonation to happen and be over with.

There was nothing.

Remembering to breathe again, he looked down. Before he could locate the briefcase, he saw the man's upturned face full of a rage more intense than he'd ever seen.

The window-catch facing Barry was secure. He smashed his elbow against the glass and was partway inside, having reached through and released the sash, when the door opened to admit the man.

"Well, young Barry, you won't be climbing for a week or two," said the CID man. "Or anything else that needs your hands. You took all the skin off 'em sliding down that drainpipe."

Barry blinked until the man came into focus. He'd always detested the smell of a hospital. He sat up, yelping with the pain that ignited his palms and fingers.

"That bald bloke, he—"

"He wanted to kill you," the detective said. "Yes, we gathered that when he came tearing out of his room and went up the stairs three at a time. We'd been waiting to see what he'd do. We thought he was trying to get away. But he wanted you, Sunshine. It took four of us to haul him away from that window. He offered us a thousand quid apiece and no hard feelings if we'd just let him attend to you before we handcuffed him."

Barry shuddered. "He was a terrorist—with a bomb! He made me take it to plant in that room, but I dropped the bloody thing the minute I had the chance. Thank God it didn't go off when it hit the ground."

The CID man was taken aback. "Bomb?"

"You didn't find it? It'll be in the airwell—and his gun. Quick, you've got to retrieve it—it could blow the whole place up for all we know!"

But the detective stayed where he was. "A bomb?" he repeated. "In the Queen Caroline? This may be news to you, Barry my old son, but

not many heads of state spend the night at the Queen Caroline Hotel these days. If they ever did.

"We keep a lookout for terrorists there, sure—but ones who might be hiding out, not assassigators."

Barry's head hurt. And on top of the pain and the delayed shock, he was starting to feel foolish. "Why were you after him then?"

The CID man made no direct answer. "His name's Dorffmann, Willi Dorffmann, and he's a bit of a king in his own line. Dethroned now, but he was big."

Barry said stubbornly, "It *must* have been a bomb. I could smell the stuff. It had a funny smell."

"You've got to feel sorry for Dorffmann," the policeman commented, insincerely. "Bringing that case all across the North Sea in a tatty old trunk hidden away in the engine room—that's where your funny smell came from—getting it ashore, coming to London to meet his client. And then he has to recruit a clown like you."

"I risked my life getting rid of that bomb!"

"I wish you'd change the record." The detective patted Barry's shoulder. "This terrorist scare—we're all getting pulled in on it—with the shortage of manpower. Take me, I'm with a specialist unit—that's how I recognized Dorffmann when he came in.

"You were a gift from the gods, son. You presented him with a chance to get the briefcase out of his room so that when we barged in on him there'd be no briefcase, no evidence, no reason to hold him. And the best of it for him was that once we'd drawn a blank he could just whistle up a partner to book in at the Queen Caroline and pick up the stuff where you'd left it."

Barry sighed and slid down under the covers, keeping his hands well clear. He couldn't understand a word of it, the whole thing was beyond him.

The CID man made a face. "A bomb, eh? Maybe you could call it that. That briefcase was full of pure heroin."



Tyler's Finest knew how to strike when the iron was hot . . .



by

Robert Edward Eckels

I read a story once about a reporter who literally had a nose for news—it grew all warm and tingly whenever a story was about to break. Mine doesn't—which may be one reason I worked for the *Tyler, Indiana, Tribune* instead of *The New York Times*. It also explains why I was out at the far end of the county when the biggest thing to hit Tyler since the '37 flood was taking place downtown.

What happened was that about the same time I was driving out to
MANHUNT—INDIANA STYLE

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interview a prize-winning 4H calf and its young owner, the State Police was sending out a teletype to all local officers to be on the lookout for a man and woman reported to be headed upriver from Louisville in a small power boat. True to the Tyler tradition of doing that little bit extra, Chief Roudebush and another of Tyler's Finest commandeered a boat with a souped-up outboard and started cruising back and forth between Tyler and the Kentucky shore opposite. And as luck would have it, after about an hour or so they finally spotted something that matched the description the State Police had given out. Roudebush immediately jumped to his feet and, unmindful of the wild rocking, he bellowed, "Halt! You're under arrest!"

Without a moment's hesitation the other boat swung away and raced for the nearest shore—Tyler. Roudebush's man gunned the outboard, nearly throwing Roudebush into the water, and raced after it.

I'll say this. It was close. There was a mad scramble up the bank, and at the top Roudebush managed to catch the girl's ankle. She swung around, kicking and scratching as she fell, and by the time Roudebush and the other officer had her under control, her companion had disappeared into a nearby cornfield.

What was later called The Great Manhunt, or more accurately The Godawful Mess, had begun.

Not being on the spot to get the story firsthand wasn't the unluckiest thing in my young life. But even so I probably wouldn't have lost my job over it if it hadn't been for Roy Elmo. Roy had come to Tyler about six months before to replace a *Tribune* photographer who had moved on to one of the Indianapolis dailies, which was what any one of us would have given our right arms for.

Anyway, I was just sitting down to start typing up my copy when E. J. came storming out of his office. E. J. is E. J. Howard—owner, publisher, and editor of the *Tribune*. He is a tall, heavy-shouldered man with a voice like a bullhorn. Roy Elmo came in behind him and peered expectantly over his shoulder. Roy is my age or a little younger but already beginning to lose his hair.

"Where the hell have you been, Jackson?" E. J. said.

"Out in the county on that—"

"For four hours?" E. J. said. "Your sense of timing is perfect. There's an escaped murderer—or worse—loose in town and you decide to

spend the morning out in the county."

"Just a minute—" I said.

"Don't you have a radio in that clunk of yours?" E.J. went on. "All you had to do was turn it on. WTYL was running back-to-back bulletins."

"Until I got them stopped," Roy said smugly.

"That's right," E.J. said. "Roy at least was on the ball. He was able to convince the sheriff this murderer might have a portable radio and be getting too much information from the bulletins about where the search was concentrating. But by then the damage was already done. It's less than three hours to press time. Half the town's been deputized to help run this guy down. The other half's dying to find out what's going on and everything we know has already gone out over the radio."

"I get the message," I said. "I'll see what I can dig up."

"You do that," E.J. said. "But just in case that's not good enough I'm keeping Roy on the story too. Because as of today he's a reporter as well as a photographer. And," he added significantly, "unlike some people I know he just might keep on being a reporter after today." He turned on his heel and stomped back to his office.

Roy continued to look at me. "You know, Jackson," he said, "I wish you liked me more."

"Is that a fact?" I said.

"Yes," he said, nodding. "It is. After all, you and Betty were pretty close once and I know she'd feel better if there were no hard feelings between us." Betty was Betty Lindsay, E.J.'s secretary and the nicest girl in six counties. And, as Roy said, we had been close once. But then he'd shown up and pretty soon there was nothing for me to do but crawl back into the woodwork and watch him take over.

"So," he went on, "I was thinking maybe I should ask you to be part of the wedding. Not best man, of course, but maybe one of the ushers."

If I'd stopped to think I'd have realized I was playing his game but I didn't stop to think. I just jumped up off the chair and threw my best punch straight at his face.

Actually, it was my only punch. I hadn't been in a fight since I was in junior high-school—and I lost that one too. Roy sidestepped quickly, blocked my swing, and hit me twice, first in the stomach and then, as I doubled over, on the jaw. I said "Oof," took two steps back I hadn't

planned on, and sat down hard.

"That's it, Jackson!" Howard roared from the doorway. "I saw the whole thing, and if there's one thing I won't have it's brawling. You're fired!"

Roy looked down at me sadly. "I guess I never told you," he said, "but I was intramural champ at college." He smiled quickly, then turned and went off after E.J. After another minute or so I managed to get enough wind back to pull myself up to my feet and leave.

Which meant that I had to pass Sally Kemperman at the receptionist's desk. She gave me a slow shake of her head. "Quitting again, Jackson?" she said.

"Your hearing is better than that," I said. "The word the man used was 'fired.'"

"That's not what I meant," she said, "and you know it. You just lie down and let Roy Elmo walk all over you. I'm beginning to think you like it."

"Unfortunately," I said, "I wasn't intramural champ. I wasn't even in the running."

"If you ask me," Sally said, "neither was he. But that wasn't what I meant either." She looked at me curiously. "What are you going to do now? Go to Wiedemann's Bar and get drunk?"

"I hadn't thought about it," I said, "but it's an idea."

"There's a better one," she said earnestly. "You could—no, forget it."

"Forget what?"

"Nothing," she said. She looked away. "I was just thinking," she said over her shoulder, "that you'd really show them if you went out and scooped Roy. But there's no way you could do that. You'd better just go on down to Wiedemann's and have yourself a good cry."

"What do you mean there's no way?" I said. There was no real reason I should care one way or the other what she thought about me. She was small and dark and a pusher. Not my type at all. I liked them tall and willowy—like Betty. But I wasn't going to let her write me off like that either. "The day will never dawn when I can't scoop Roy Elmo twice before breakfast—or any other time either."

"Sure," she said. "You just don't want to now, that's all."

"You better believe it," I said. But even as I spoke I knew the words were a lie. I did want to scoop Roy Elmo, and, by God, I would too.

The police station was just under the hill on West Street, and usually you could count on at least a couple of officers hanging around. Today, however, it was empty except for Dan Roudebush, sitting alone and disconsolate in his office.

"Well," he said as I came in, "whose door did you run into?"

I touched my jaw gingerly where it had begun to swell. "Roy Elmo's," I said.

"No kidding?" Roudebush said. He eyes lit up and he sat straighter in his chair. "And you're here to press charges. Assault and battery. Or better still, if we can make it stick, aggravated assault. He could get six months—maybe even a year."

"Unfortunately," I said, "I swung first."

"Any witnesses?"

I nodded.

Roudebush slumped back on his chair. "Too bad," he said.

"I couldn't agree more," I said. "I thought you and Roy were buddies."

"We were," Roudebush said. "But he was here this morning when the State teletype came in. He's the one who persuaded me to try to catch the two of them when they passed by instead of just reporting back. He was going to take pictures when I brought them in." He snorted. "Some pictures! I look like the biggest damn fool since God made Adam."

"You did catch the girl," I said.

"Sure," Roudebush said bitterly, "but since it was outside the city limits the sheriff insisted she was his prisoner. Well, he can have her. He can have the whole damned case. I told the rest of the boys they could join the posse if they wanted to. I'm staying out of it."

"In that case," I said, "I guess my best bet is to drive over to the county building."

"You can if you want," Roudebush said, "but it won't do you any good. Nobody's there. Last I heard they'd set up some kind of headquarters at Freeman's farm. They got the girl there too, but it's supposed to be a big secret, so don't tell anybody where you heard it. And while you're at it, when you write this up for the paper spell my name wrong. Maybe everybody'll think it's somebody else."

The search was a little better organized now than when I had driven

MANHUNT—INDIANA STYLE

into town and I was stopped at three different points by special deputies who insisted on searching my car each time. As one of them explained, "We know you wouldn't help him willingly, but maybe he forced you to lock him in the trunk." The third time I opened the trunk without waiting to be asked.

In any case, I finally broke free of town and was just beginning to pick up speed when a wildly waving figure stepped out from among the trees lining the road. For one awful moment I thought sure I was going to hit him, but then the brakes took hold and I skidded to a stop inches away from his outstretched hands.

"You damn fool!" I said as he trotted up to me, holding awkwardly onto the immense holster flopping at his side. "I could have killed you!"

"Don't worry about it," he said breathlessly. I recognized him now. His name was Herb Albany and in less exciting times he ran a hardware store at the corner of Main and West. "This is important. We caught the guy, and we need your car to carry him back to town."

I almost knocked him over getting out of the car. "Where?"

Albany gestured dramatically toward the side of the road where five of his Main Street buddies prodded and poked their hunting shotguns at the most nervous-looking individual I'd seen in a long time, and my sudden surge of hope died.

"You've got the wrong man, Herb," I said. "That's one of the FBI men from down in Louisville."

Herb looked at me suspiciously. "You sure?"

I nodded. "I met him last year at a Law Day Dinner. He was one of the speakers."

"Well, why didn't he say so?" Herb glared at the FBI man, then swallowed his disappointment and waved to his friends. "Come on. We're just wasting our time here." And grumbling and muttering they all loped off back into the woods.

As soon as they were gone, the FBI man dropped back against a tree and let his breath out in a great whoosh. "They never told me it'd be like this," he said. "Gangsters, bank robbers, hoodlums—they covered them all. But not a word about idiots with shotguns. God knows what would have happened if you hadn't shown up."

"Maybe next time," I said, "you'll know not to go wandering around loose in the woods."

"I was just trying to get out to Freeman's farm," he said, "and this old geezer at a gas station told me about a shortcut." He shook his head. "Damndest road I've ever seen. Halfway up I broke an axle—and he said he drove it every day."

"He probably does," I said. "What he forgot to tell you is that he uses a tractor—which is considerably higher off the ground than your average passenger car. But if you still want to get out to Freeman's, I'll take you."

"Great."

He paused and smiled wryly. "But no shortcuts, O.K.?"

I grinned back. "O.K.," I said.

The agent's name was Kincaid. They thought, he told me, the man everybody was chasing was a petty hoodlum named Soapy Halloran who had turned to robbing banks as a means of moving up in the world.

"You *think*?" I asked.

"Well," Kincaid said apologetically, "nobody's really seen him except your chief of police and he can't make a positive ID. What we do know is that Soapy and an unidentified woman were holed up in a shack on the river front across from Louisville. We raided the place, but they were already gone and so was a boat the owner said should have been there. It's a pretty fair assumption that's how Soapy and the girl made their getaway. But there's no guarantee that they're the ones your chief flushed."

"Couldn't the owner identify the boat?"

Kincaid nodded. "Unfortunately," he said, "nobody thought to secure it and the river carried it away. God knows where it is now. On the positive side, though, if it isn't Soapy why did he run?"

"Good question," I said and turned onto the dirt road leading back to Freeman's farm.

Three police cars and a civilian sedan were parked in a rough semicircle in a meadow behind Freeman's house. A coffee pot had been set up over a camp stove near the open end of the ring, and even before I parked I had no difficulty picking Roy Elmo out among the men clustered around it.

"Oh, no," I said, "it couldn't be."

"What's the matter?" Kincaid said.

"The story of my life," I said and got out of the car.

After Kincaid had identified himself, he and the sheriff went over to where a small blonde girl in blue jeans and a man's shirt sat on the ground under the half-watchful eye of a bored deputy. I stayed with the rest of the group, kneeling to help myself to the coffee. Roy looked at me suspiciously.

"What are you doing here?" he said.

"Just acting as chauffeur," I said.

"Good," he said. "Keep it that way. This is my story and nobody's going to horn in."

"You know, Roy," I said, sitting back on my heels with my cup, "if I were a betting man, I'd say you knew about this setup all along—probably from when you got the radio broadcasts stopped—and that you set that whole thing up in the office this morning just to keep from having to share it."

Roy smiled maliciously. "Sometimes, Jackson," he said, "you do show sparks of intelligence. Too bad it's always after it's too late to do any good."

I didn't respond because by now Kincaid and the sheriff had concluded their interview with the girl and had come back to rejoin the group around the coffee pot. The sheriff was shaking his head. "That's the way it's been ever since we caught her," he said. "She won't open her mouth for anything."

"Of course she won't," Roy said, pushing himself to his feet. "I wouldn't either if everybody I saw spent the first five minutes reading me my rights under the Constitution. What you need is somebody who isn't bound by the rules to go over and talk to her. Like me."

"What would you do, Roy?" I said. "Beat it out of her?"

"No," he said scornfully. "I'm no psychologist but I learned a long time ago that if you want to catch flies you don't use vinegar. I'm willing to bet that girl's scared half out of her mind and a little unofficial honey might be all she needs to break her down. It's worth a try, isn't it?"

The sheriff looked at Kincaid, who shrugged. "I suppose it wouldn't hurt," Kincaid said.

"There's only one thing," Roy said. "I want an exclusive on anything I get. That means no releases to WTYL until after the paper hits the

street. And—" he glanced sidelong at me "—it also means holding Jackson here the same time."

The sheriff rubbed one hammy hand across his jaw and looked at me dubiously.

"Roy," I said, "if you get any information from that girl that you can use in the paper I'll gladly stay here until hell freezes over."

Roy grinned. "I guess that settles it then," he said and bent to pour a fresh cup of coffee.

"On the other hand," I said, rising, "you don't mind if I come along, do you, just to make sure you aren't pulling some kind of a fast one. And," I added, "if you don't get anything, then I get a crack—same terms and deal."

Roy hesitated, then grinned. "Let's make it really fair," he said. He held out his filled cup. "You go first."

That gave me an uneasy feeling I'd been suckered into playing his game again, but I took the cup and went over to where the girl was sitting. Roy followed but stopped back by the guard where he could be within earshot.

I squatted down on my heels beside the girl and offered her the cup. Maybe it was just the too-large shirt but she looked very young and vulnerable. "Go ahead," I said. "You need it more than I do."

She continued to look at me for another long moment, then took the cup but held it without drinking. "You're not a cop, are you?" she said at last.

"No," I said, "I'm a reporter."

"Then maybe you can help me," she said. "There's no point talking to *them*." She gestured with her free hand to indicate the line of police cars. The hand was well formed and delicately made but slightly grubby from the long day in the field, and innocent of both jewelry and polish. "They got their minds made up Bobby Joe is a thief and that's a lie."

"Bobby Joe?"

"Bobby Joe Smith," she said. "And he never stole anything in his life, unless it was me. And he did that legal even though my daddy doesn't think so. We were married just yesterday in Jeffersonville—by a real minister too. You can't get any more legal than that, can you, Mister?"

"Not if you're of age," I said.

"I know," she said. "That's the problem. I'm not. My daddy didn't want us to do it, but we figured once it was done and all, he'd just have to accept it. What he did, though, was get real mad and threaten to have it annulled. That's why we took that boat and that's why Bobby Joe ran when that policeman tried to stop us. He thought my daddy had put the law on us and he knew it would be worse on him than me. Otherwise, he never would have left me."

"I'm sure he wouldn't," I said. I looked down at the dirt between her feet. "What's your daddy's name?"

She shook her head vehemently. "No," she said. "I don't want you bringing him here. I'm Susan Smith now and that's what I'm going to stay."

"Even though it means Bobby Joe might have to go to jail?"

"They have to catch him first," she said.

"That's right," I said. I asked her a couple of more questions—the church where she'd been married, things like that, but she was done talking. Finally I rose and turned to go back toward the others. Roy was nowhere in sight.

The sheriff looked at me, embarrassed.

"Where did he go?" I said although I already knew the answer.

"Over to the house," the sheriff said. He shrugged his big shoulders, more embarrassed than ever. "I'm sorry, Jackson, but there really wasn't anything we could do about it. The agreement was between the two of you and if he didn't want to keep it we couldn't hold him against his will."

"No," I said, "I guess you couldn't."

Roy was in the house a long time, and when he came out he was grinning from ear to ear. I rose to meet him as he came up to the rest of us.

"Sorry about that, Jackson," he said. "But nothing was said about not using the phone."

"You got the story in then?" I said.

"Dictated it straight to the linotype man." He glanced down at his watch. "First runs ought to be coming out any minute."

"Too bad," I said.

"Maybe for you. Not for me." He paused and cocked his head to look at me quizzically. "Unless, of course," he said, "you were thinking

of going another round." He made boxing motions with his hands.

"No," I said. "But I was going to suggest that it would have been smarter if you'd checked first with that new bride to see if she could explain why she isn't wearing a wedding band."

Roy looked at me for another long moment, then turned toward the sheriff, who nodded soberly. "That's right, Roy," he said. "Not a sign of a ring anywhere on her."

Roy hesitated another fraction of a second, then turned again, this time to race back to the house.

It was a little after five when I got back to the Tribune Building. E.J. was alone in his office. "You fink," he said as I came in.

"Checked out the girl's story, did you?" I said.

E.J. nodded. "As best we could," he said. "No record of any marriage license issued to a Bobby Joe or Susan anything in Floyd County in the last three months. None of the ministers listed in the phone book remembers performing a ceremony yesterday either."

"Too bad you didn't do that first," I said. "Which reminds me, where's your star reporter?"

"Gone," E.J. said. "Fired or quit—we had a big argument over which. Not that it's going to make any difference. Those papers sold out as soon as they hit the street—with a lead story as phony as a three-dollar bill." He looked up at me mournfully and for a moment I almost felt sorry for him. "You know what's going to happen the next time I show up for a Lions Club luncheon?"

"Every silver lining has its cloud," I said. "On the other hand, just how big depends on you. After Roy left, the sheriff and I had a long talk—and afterwards he got a copy of the paper, showed it to the girl as proof we'd bought her story, and told her she could go. She took off like a little comet on the four o'clock bus to Cincinnati. What she doesn't know is that two FBI men are riding right behind her, with two more ready to take up the trail when she gets off, figuring that sooner or later she'll lead them straight back to Halloran."

E.J. looked at me warily. "So?"

"So," I said, "all you have to do is say you put the story out at their request and you're home free."

"Except," E.J. said, "the sheriff belongs to the Lions too and he knows I didn't."

"Sure," I said, "but once I explained that the paper would really regret not being able to support him for reelection again, he decided he wouldn't have any problem backing you up. So will the FBI." I smiled. "The agent in charge owes me a small favor, which means the only problem is the question of my future employment."

"What problem?" E.J. said. "You never left the payroll."

"Actually," I said, "what I had in mind was for you to call some of your friends in Indianapolis with a recommendation."

E.J. looked at me thoughtfully. "You know," he said, "not too long ago I would have said you wouldn't last a minute in the city. Now I'm not so sure. I'll make the calls."

"Fair enough," I said. That settled, I left, just in time to catch Sally Kemperman scuttling away from the door.

"You were listening," I said.

"I was not," she said. "I was looking for my scarf." She looked around, realized she had left it on the front counter, and hastily snatched it up.

"Well, anyway," I said, "I'm glad you're here."

Sally looked away. "Roy Elmo's leaving," she said, twirling her scarf around her neck.

"I know," I said. "E.J. told me."

"I mean leaving town," Sally said. "Betty Lindsay's going with him. Although," she added after a moment, "she may change her mind when she hears you're going to Indianapolis. Betty always was an opportunist."

"Unlike you," I said.

Sally grinned and tucked her hand under my arm. "I thought you'd never notice," she said.

A funny thing happened then. My nose grew all warm and tingly. "You know," I said, "this may not turn out to be such a bad day after all."



Barbie called her "Methodical Millie" . . .

THE KITCHEN FLOOR



He wiped up the egg yolk with his toast, washed it down with the last of his coffee, and glanced sourly at the cane propped against the dinette table.

"How much longer you gonna go stumping around on that thing?"

Mildred stared at him, thinking of the vicious shove he'd given her the week before that had sent her sprawling, her ankle twisted beneath her.

"Another week or so, I imagine," she said levelly. "As soon as I can put my full weight on the foot."

He grunted and pushed himself back from the table. "Big deal," he said. Without looking at her, he put on his coat and left the house.

When she heard the door slam behind him, she relaxed her tense shoulders and sat quietly for a moment, savoring the emptiness of the house. Then she rose awkwardly, favoring her left foot, and carried the dishes to the sink, washing them in hot sudsy water, drying them, and putting them away carefully in the cabinet. She poured herself another cup of coffee and sat down at the table again. From the drawer beneath the table she took a pencil and a 3x5 memo pad. This was ordinarily her favorite time of day, the house quiet and awaiting her ministrations, the clean white pad ready for her daily list of chores and reminders, the freshly sharpened pencil at the ready. Today, she was tense and abstracted, and the homely little routine afforded her no pleasure. She sighed and began writing in her small neat hand:

S

M

V

Here she frowned. Better not attempt any vacuuming yet. Changing the sheets and polishing the mirrors were simple enough tasks, but vacuuming involved too much walking, too much bending and stretching. Although the ankle was no longer painful, Dr. Vincent had told her to keep her weight off it as much as possible and she couldn't run the risk of straining it. She erased the V and continued writing.

L

I

Lch

C

Barbie—

She smiled as she wrote her daughter's name. Barbie loved her apple cake—she'd make her take most of it home with her when she left. The smile faded as she wrote the next item.

F C

Pencil poised for the next entry, she hesitated. She stared thoughtfully at the shining expanse of yellow vinyl on the kitchen floor, and then wrote:

K F

Not much of a list, she thought as she glanced rapidly over it, but when I'll be back in stride soon. So. Get started on the bed and mirrors, then tackle the laundry and iron Frank's shirts. A waste of time—they were permanent press—but he refused to wear them unless they were absolutely wrinkle-free. So she'd do them as usual, disrupting the routine as little as possible.

By one o'clock she'd finished the last of the shirts and thought about lunch. Toast and tea, she decided. Invalid's fare, but then she was a semi-invalid, and the thought of a sandwich or soup had no appeal.

She settled at the table with her cup and plate and drew the memo pad to her. She drew lines through the first four items and then, draining her cup, crossed out "Lch." She smiled wryly. "Methodical Millie," Barbie called her, teasing her about being an inveterate list-maker and timetableer. Well, so be it, she thought—I'm too set in my ways to change now.

She set about assembling the cake ingredients. This particular chore was a labor of love. She mixed the batter and spread it in a flat pyrex dish. She peeled and sliced the apples, splashed them with lemon juice, and distributed them thickly on top, sprinkling them liberally with white sugar, dusting them with cinnamon, and dotting the surface with butter. Lovely. She slid the dish into the warmed oven and set the timer. By the time she'd straightened up the kitchen and freshened herself up a bit, her beautiful girl would be here.

She crossed C off the list.

By three o'clock, when the doorbell rang, the house was redolent with the scent of apple and cinnamon. "Oh, heavenly," said Barbie, hugging her mother. "Mom, you shouldn't be baking—you shouldn't be on your feet at all. How does your ankle feel?"

"It feels fine, stop fussing." Mildred Burton hung her daughter's coat in the hall closet and led her into the kitchen. "Is this the sponge-rubber toweling?" She drew it out of the bag and set it on the counter top. "Primrose yellow. Nice—it matches the kitchen. Now sit down and we'll have some cake and coffee and a good long natter, as your grandma used to say."

Barbie took a bite of the warm cake and sighed with pleasure. "I never can get the top crisp and candied like that." She put down her fork. "Mom. You're not fooling me, you know. I don't buy that story

about reaching for a can of peaches and falling off the stool. Pop did it, didn't he?"

"It happened the way I told you. I'm not one of those battered wives. It's just that your father drinks too much sometimes and doesn't know what he's doing—"

"Oh, he knows, all right. He doesn't have to be drunk to make your life miserable. He's been doing it for as long as I can remember. If I hadn't married Jack and moved out, I think I would have ended up killing him. As it is, I worry about you all the time."

"There's no need to, darling. I can look out for myself after all these years. What bothers me is what he did to Patty. How is she?"

"Miserable, Mom. It's been a week now, and she's still huddled inside herself like a little snail. How did he know she was going out on her first date, anyway? You're always so careful talking to me on the phone—"

"I know. It was my fault. I thought he was down in the basement watching the Saturday game, but he must have come up for some more beer, heard me talking in the bedroom, and picked up the extension here in the kitchen. Has she heard from the boy again?"

"After that scene Pop made?" Barbie smiled bitterly. "He really did a hatchet job on that kid, jeering at him about his long hair, his clothes—and the boy's immaculate, Mom, a wonderful kid from a lovely family. And then all those filthy remarks about kids today 'making out' and 'shacking up.' By the time Jack threw him out, the damage was done. Patty dreads going to school every day—thinks the kids are laughing behind her back about her crazy drunken grandfather. She'll be a long time getting over it."

Mildred Burton's face hardened. "Whatever else he's done," she said, "I'll never forgive him for that. It won't happen again, Barbie, I promise you."

"No, it won't. Because he'll never set foot in our house again." She bent her head to hide the quick rush of tears.

"It's all right, darling. Come, have another cup of coffee and let's talk about something else."

Barbie looked at her watch. "Lord, yes. Another half hour and I'll have to leave." She glanced at the memo pad on the table and picked it up: "Good heavens, did you do all this today—you, the walking wounded?" She scanned the list. "I've gotten pretty good at translating

this shorthand of yours. But what's FC?"

"Fix cane. That's why I asked you to pick up the toweling. The tip of the cane is making scuff marks on the vinyl here in the kitchen and I thought I'd pad it with the toweling—it'll cushion the jarring effect when I walk too."

"That's a good idea. But this floor is like a mirror. Mine's only a year old and it doesn't look half as good. Talking about the floor, I see it's on your list, and I absolutely forbid it, Mom. You've done enough today. I'll run the polisher over it before I leave if you're dead set on getting it done."

"No, dear, I wouldn't think of it. You're right, it doesn't really need it. I'll let it go for a few days."

"Promise?"

"Promise."

"All right, then. But I can fix the cane for you before I go. Do you want to attach it with rubber bands?" Her mother nodded distractedly. "They're here in the drawer, right?"

Mildred watched as Barbie tore off a towel from the perforated roll, folded it, and fitted it to bottom of the cane, fastening it securely with two heavy rubber bands from the drawer. "Gaudy if not neat. I think it'll do the job for you, though. Do you want to try it?"

Mildred took a few steps with the padded cane and smiled her approval.

"It's perfect," she said. "Like leaning on a marshmallow."

Barbie laughed as her mother drew a line through FC. "Well, I'm off," she said. She gave her mother a swift hug and kiss. "Don't tell his lordship I was here—the less he knows the better. I suppose he'll come in smelling like a brewery and you'll have cold beer and pretzels waiting."

"Old habits die hard, Barbie. Goodbye, say hello to Jack and Patty for me."

Mildred closed the door after her daughter and leaned heavily against it for a few moments, her head pressed against the frame. Then she straightened wearily and made her way back to the kitchen, turning on the lights as she went. Frank liked to come home to a well lit house.

Within half an hour she had pork chops simmering in a tomato-and-pepper sauce, noodles ready to plunge into boiling water, and salad

greens crisping in the refrigerator. She was sliding pretzels and potato chips into two bowls when she heard the key in the lock. Two tall cans of icy beer were standing beside the bowls when he walked into the kitchen.

He cocked his head toward the basement doorway.

"Why isn't the television on?"

"I still can't manage the stairs."

He snorted. "Boy, are you working this thing to death. Go ahead, keep throwing it in my face. It don't bother me *at all*, sister." His red-veined eyes glared at her. "The only thing I'm sorry for, I should of done a better job while I was at it." He scooped up the beer, jammed the bowl of chips on top of the pretzels, and headed for the stairs.

"Don't you want a tray?" She followed him, leaning heavily on the cane.

He twisted around, his face ugly with resentment.

"Don't do me no favors," he said and turned back to the stairs.

As he moved his foot for the first step, she lifted the padded end of the cane and gave him a violent shove that sent him plunging down the steep flight. He landed with a crash, his head smashing against the basement wall, his neck snapping with the impact. She knew with utmost certainty that he was dead.

She turned, her step firm and assured, and crossed to the phone to call Dr. Vincent, stopping at the table on the way to lean over the memo pad and draw a neat line through KF.

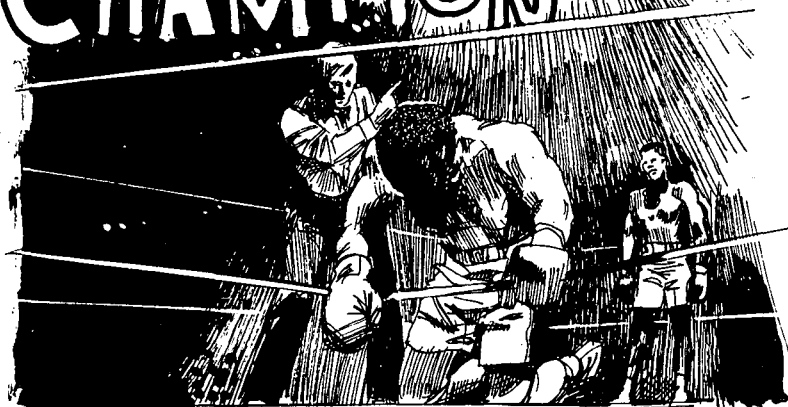
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Even a champion has to know when to quit. . .

DEATH OF A CHAMPION



by **WALTER DEAN MYERS**

I asked a sportswriter friend to get tickets for me and he had, so I ended up at the fight. I had followed the career of Billy Turner, a likeable kid from Harlem, since he first broke into the heavyweight picture a little over a decade ago. He had survived an awesome beating in the early rounds of what has been called a classic fight to become the second youngest heavyweight champion of the world. Later, when Turner was banned from boxing for two years because of his association with

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known criminals, I felt sorry for him.

I became interested in him after he had dropped his manager and started making a comeback. He couldn't get the good fights because no one in the country wanted to fight him. Madison Square Garden wouldn't even put him on the card of a major fight. But slowly and surely, he fought his way back to the top, back to the championship.

It had taken a lot away from him. Men he could have beaten easily a few years earlier were bullying him around the ring. Somehow he would dig into himself, and draw on something that would give him a slender win. His friends had advised him to quit the ring, to hang up his gloves while he was still champion. He was always promising to quit, but something kept him in the ring. It was like an obsession, a kind of immortality he had to prove over and over again.

My name is Crater, like the disappearing judge, and I'm a detective on the New York City police force. I'm the oldest black detective on the squad. I guess, like Turner, I'm a bit slower than I used to be.

The guy I saw him fight was a comer, a young kid out of South Philadelphia who had all the tools. He was strong, rugged, and had seven years of youth on his side. He and Turner were both black, but Turner was different. He held a special place in the black community. I guess, in thinking about it, it was because he was probably the last of the great black sports heroes—you know, Joe Louis, Jackie Robinson, Sugar Ray Robinson, Willie Mays, and a few others. The new black athletes are no different from their white counterparts—hip, money hungry, and far removed from the people. That's why I hated to see Turner beaten.

The fight started out slower than I had expected, with Turner trying to bait his younger opponent. It didn't work. The kid just waded in and threw blows to the midsection that left ugly welts along Turner's rib cage. The crowd was screaming for blood, sensing that a new champ was about to be crowned.

I watched, a tight knot in my stomach. By the fourth round the pattern seemed to be set. The kid was stalking Turner relentlessly; cutting off the ring, and punishing him against the ropes. Then suddenly Turner caught the kid with a right lead that buckled his knees and brought his hands down to his sides. For a moment, as the kid reached for the ropes, it seemed the tide had turned. And then, as quickly as Turner's flurry had begun, it stopped. He let the kid tie him up and

then took two shots to the body and a looping left that sent him to the canvas. He struggled to his knees, draped his arms over the lower rope, and stared out into the darkness as the referee counted.

I didn't wait for the count to end. I turned and walked through the screaming jostling mob and out a side exit. My car was several blocks away and the hiss of the crowd was still in my ears until I closed the door and started the ignition. I thought about stopping for a few beers, but then I remembered that the talk would be about the fight, and I wasn't in the mood. It wasn't until I reached my apartment and poured myself a drink that I switched on the television. And found out that Billy Turner was dead.

The morning papers were filled with the kind of stories that you would expect. An interview with Turner's young wife, a pledge by the new champion to give part of his purse to charity in Turner's name, that kind of thing.

One story hit me a little differently than the others. It was a story by Jack Weston, an old timer with one of the tabloids who had turned in his best copy a quarter of a century ago. Now he spends most of his time in the city room doing meaningless rewrites of AP releases and sneaking drinks in the men's room. The only time he gets to an important sports event is during a championship fight or the world series, when the paper sends out anyone who can pass a third-grade literacy test in the hope that at least one reporter covering the event will come up with something different.

Weston had said that Turner didn't look right to him just before the knockout, that maybe he wasn't physically sound. Everything is investigated during a ring death, so an autopsy was performed at the University Hospital instead of at the morgue. They found enough digitalis in Turner to have killed two men.

I asked to be assigned to the case and Captain Horowitz, who knew I was a fan of Turner, consented.

"The first thing you have to remember," the big slope-shouldered veteran said, "is that it doesn't have to be a homicide."

Right. Of course it didn't. But why would Turner, in better condition than 99 percent of the men in the world, be taking digitalis, a heart medicine? What Horowitz was really telling me was to be cool. O.K., so I'd be cool.

My first stop was Bunny's Gym where Bobby Cooper, Turner's manager, said he would meet me.

"See this guy?" Cooper nodded toward a young Puerto Rican middleweight. "He could be good if he was hungry."

I watched the fighter shadowbox, throwing punches in quick flurries against an imaginary opponent. I wondered what was going on in his mind.

"Was Billy hungry?" I asked.

"Yeah," Cooper answered, "he was hungry. When he first started he was real hungry. Then when he had it made, he had too much pride to let down. He was a real champion. A real champ . . ."

His voice trailed off and I gave him a moment to compose himself. The small gym, tucked away in a corner of Rego Park, was full of young sweating bodies, and the slap of leather against flesh crackled in the warm heavy air.

"They say he had the digitalis sometime just before the fight," I said. "Who was with him?"

"Me, his trainer Joey Goldstein, Pop, and Archie Bell. Archie's been working out with him for the last few fights. Oh yeah, that little sportswriter from the *News*, Phil something-or-other, dropped by to talk to him in the dressing room."

"Did you ever know him to take that stuff before?"

"C'mon, what're you talking about? What's a fighter like Billy gonna be doing with a bad heart? That's what that stuff is for, right? A bad heart?"

"Yeah. And too much of it can kill a man. Especially a man under a lot of stress—"

"All I know is that I lost two things, Crater." Cooper turned toward me and his eyes were misted. "A world champion fighter and the best friend I ever had."

I had heard rumors that Turner had fired his business manager a week before the fight. It wasn't anything new with Turner, he was always firing somebody and hiring them back after the fight. Just the same I decided to put the manager, a guy named Chase, on the top of my list. I also wrote Joey Goldstein and Archie Bell in my notebook. I saw Pop Reese, Turner's long-time friend and assistant trainer, over in a corner having coffee and I stopped by for a few words with him.

Pop was kind of a legend. He had been an outstanding lightweight back in the thirties, when there were still enough little guys in the United States to make a difference in the lighter divisions. He had lost an eye in a controversial decision to the then up-and-coming Lou Ambers and left the ring. But he had gone on to become instrumental in developing a number of successful younger fighters, his last being Billy Turner. He had been the one to bring Billy off the streets of Harlem and into the gym for the first time, he had bought him his first trunks and protective cup. He had loved Turner like a son.

"Hi, Pop."

"Hello." He looked up, turning his good eye to take a better look. "Who are you?"

"Don Crater." I showed him my badge. "I'd like to ask you a few questions if I may."

"Yeah, go right ahead."

"You remember anybody being around Billy before the fight? Anybody you didn't know?"

"Anybody that didn't belong around Billy wasn't going to be around him!" Pop shot back. "You don't let just anybody around your boy."

"What about this guy Chase?" I asked. "I heard Billy fired him just before the fight."

"Chase? He's one of them downtown guys," Pop answered. "He ain't a fight man, he's a money man. Billy said he seen him hanging around with gamblers. You remember Billy got into trouble that time?"

I remembered and told him so.

"Well, since then he'd been keeping both his eyes open. Billy wouldn't put fifty cents on a number, wouldn't even bet two dollars on a one-horse race."

"You think there was bad blood between Billy and Chase?" I asked.

"No, there warn't no bad blood, Billy just didn't trust him."

"Did you ever see Billy take any medicine?"

"Nothing except some of them vitamin pills," Pop responded. "Hey, did you know I knew one of the first black cops in New York, guy by the name of Battle?"

I had learned that Joey Goldstein had taken off for Puerto Rico right after the fight. I called his house to see if he had left a forwarding address and was told by his daughter that he was flying back to the city.

He had called and wanted to know if it was true that Billy had been murdered. I told her we weren't sure. I wanted to see if Goldstein was actually coming back to New York before I said too much.

When I called back later in the evening, sure enough, he had just arrived and invited me over. He was either a very cool killer or I could scratch him off my list.

When I got there I skipped the preliminaries and got right down to questions.

"Well, look, I don't really know," he said, "but there were stories."

Goldstein knew more than "stories." You don't survive in the fight racket for as many years as he had with your head in the sand. I decided to lean on him a little.

"Joey, I want to know what you know," I said in a voice low enough to make him lean across the table to hear me. "I can get your license if I have to: I can get it and make you go through every damn court in the country to get it back. You know it, and I know it, so talk to me."

"My license?" Goldstein's face reddened unevenly. "What kind of creepiness is this? I come all the way from Puerto Ricó when I hear Billy's been killed! I loved the guy and you're talking about getting my license!"

"Yeah, and you're talking about stories you've heard," I said. I don't like pushing on people and Goldstein seemed like a decent enough guy, but I didn't have the time or inclination to wait around while he decided what was pertinent to the investigation and what wasn't. I also knew he could tell me to get the hell out of his place right then and there if he wanted to, but I counted on the fact that if he didn't kill Turner he would want to help.

"I heard there was a lot of money on Banks, the guy Turner fought. Banks is good, he's a comer, but the amount of money that I heard was being put down was too much." Goldstein picked up a pack of cigarettes from the table and nervously shuffled one out. "I thought the kid had a good shot at Turner, but I had-hoped we could pull it out. Maybe I'm sentimental but it wasn't no sure thing."

I got the names of some people who were putting big money down after I agreed to keep my source secret. Goldstein also told me the amount that was out in the street. It was close enough to a quarter of a million to make you want to round off the figures. I checked with my bookie and got his professional opinion on the money. It was a lot, he

said, but not outrageous. Maybe Goldstein was being sentimental.

Goldstein had given me the number of Turner's sparring partner, Archie Bell. It was a gym and Archie said he'd meet me at a bar over on Thirty-first Street across from the post office. He asked me if I wanted to talk to him about Billy dying and I said yes. He spoke very quietly into the phone.

"I didn't do it, man," he said. I told him to meet me at the bar at eight.

The bar where I met Cooper was the kind you used to find all over New York. There were pictures of oldtime football and baseball greats along the walls, and framed pictures of guys who had left the bar during the Second World War and hadn't made it back. It had seen better days but it wasn't the worst bar in the city either.

I sat at the far end of the bar facing the door and waited for the bartender to come down to me. I showed him my badge and told him I was waiting for Bell.

"Archie do something?" he asked.

"Not that I know of," I answered.

The bartender said he would put Bell on to me when he came in, and I sat and relaxed for a while, sipping bourbons and cokes until I lost count. At about a quarter past ten Bell came in, and it took just about all the strength I had to pull myself together to talk to him.

Bell was a big open guy, with huge hands that nearly hid the stein of beer he ordered. There was scar tissue above both eyes and a thickness in his speech from too many lost bouts.

"Yeah, I was real good," he said, hunching his shoulders in a short jerky movement, "but then I didn't get the breaks. You know how that goes."

I didn't but I nodded anyway. I asked him what he thought of Turner being killed and if he thought there was any gambling money behind it.

"It was bad, man, you know. The cat was O.K. with me. Anytime you needed a few dollars he was right there. If he had it, you got it. I don't know who would want to kill him. He didn't mess over nobody or anything like that." He lifted the stein and his deep brown throat bobbed as he emptied it. "I heard there was a lot of money floating around, but you can't tell about them things. Sometimes people think they can buy them a win by putting a lot of money down on one of the

fighters.”

“Did you have any money on the fight?”

“Yeah.”

“How much did you win?”

“Twenty dollars.” He looked up at me mournfully. “I didn’t know the man was gonna be hurt like that. It made me so sick I didn’t even collect the money.”

He could have been lying but for some reason I believed him. I paid the tab and grabbed a cab home. There were a few things about the fight that were making a little sense. Maybe Chase, the guy Turner had fired, would come up with the rest of the answers. One thing was certain—everybody, including Archie Bell, really liked Turner. Of course, I hadn’t met Chase yet.

“No, I didn’t like Turner.”

Chase was short and fat, with a shiny toupee that didn’t, even in the non-greasy spots, match the color of the small thatch of real hair he still had around his ears. “I got a mother who’s still alive,” he said. “She’s almost eighty years old. She’s never done a thing in her life against me. But I don’t like her. That’s the way I am. I treat everybody the same, no matter what color they are, what religion, whatever. Billy Turner I didn’t like and I didn’t dislike. The guy got killed, it’s too bad, but it doesn’t break my heart. Billy Turner, you, my mother, Santa Claus—I’ll get a beer and I’ll live through it.”

“Why did he fire you?”

“Because he was stupid.” Chase took the seven-inch cigar out of his mouth, saw it was out, and put it back in again. “Turner was a simple guy. He read all the papers about how wonderful he was and how pure, and he started believing it. I had a deal for him where he would retire, open up a bar called ‘The Champ,’ and live easy. He didn’t want to go into business with the people I got for him. They were gonna give him thirty percent of the business and he don’t want in. You explain it.”

“So he fired you.”

“So he fired me.” Chase took the cigar out again. “So I didn’t kill him.”

“You know anything about the money bet against him? The word’s around that the bucks were big.”

"Yeah? So what? The guy's black and he's a hero," Chase said. "There's always gonna be heart money around to bet on a guy like Turner and there's always gonna be smart people around to grab it. Believe me."

I started to ask to see the records of his dealings with Turner when the phone rang. Chase stuck the receiver between his cheek and his shoulder and started fishing around in his desk drawers as he talked. I thought that half of his phone jargon was intended to impress me. It didn't. Finally, he came up with one of those black accounting books with a red binding, and pushed it across the desk, signaling for me to take a look through it.

I had to spend the rest of the day in court on a six-month-old manslaughter case and I got home late. I reminded myself that I was getting tired of living in a studio apartment and even more tired of living alone. My message service called and told me to contact Captain Horowitz.

I dialed the phone. Horowitz answered and said he wanted to switch me to the Waring case. A guy named Waring claimed that two guys had come into his jewelry store and shot and killed his partner during a hold-up. Everything was too pat and Horowitz wanted it checked out.

He also told me that Turner's official cause of death had been listed as accidental. The theory was that the digitalis didn't have to be the cause of death, that his heart could have gone into fibrillation from the blows during the fight. In other words, if we found a murderer it would be listed as a homicide; if not, it wouldn't look as bad on the record. So much for the war on statistics.

There was nothing on television, at least nothing that wouldn't be twice as absurd if I watched it alone. I made myself a drink, and started going over the ledger I had picked up from Chase.

Chase was a slob of a guy and the book was as sloppy as he was—some of the pages were stained with coffee, and only half were numbered. I thumbed slowly through the book, not understanding most of the entries, except that they appeared to be expenses paid by Chase for Turner. So much for the rental of a gym, so much for hand wraps, so much for laundry. The list would go on for pages and pages, then suddenly there would be a series of whopping income figures for

a fight. They would be huge, but not nearly what you read in the papers. I decided to take the book downtown the next day to see if the bunco boys could find something in it.

I drove to work the next day, milling the case over in my mind when one of the entries in Chase's ledger came back to me. It was an invoice number and an amount that was supposed to be paid to a hospital. It was different from the other entries and could have meant that somebody was pocketing some money. I drove uptown to the hospital and checked the invoice against paid bills.

The whole thing took less than ten minutes. I even got a free cup of coffee from a volunteer. I looked at the neat rows of numbers and matched them against services. I added them up to see if they matched the figure in Chase's book. They matched, but it hardly mattered at that point because between the rows of figures I had read a story. I called Horowitz and asked for another day on the case.

"You really need it?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"You want some back-up?"

"I don't think I'll need it."

The gym was nearly deserted in the morning. A cleaning man was mopping down the joint with ammonia and a businessman type was working up a sweat on the heavy bag. Pop Reese was having coffee and a bagel on the edge of the ring. He had his own cup, a porcelain affair without a handle that could once have been a shaving mug. He pushed the paper container the coffee had come in towards me and poured in half of his coffee.

"They got you up early today," he said.

"Yeah." The coffee was still warm and a lot too sweet. I looked over at the businessman and watched him punch the bag. He swung with his arms, there was little body in it, and he had to push the bag to make it swing.

"He pays fifteen dollars a week to come here and do that," Pop Reese said.

"Sorry to learn about your wife." I looked at him. His old hands trembled slightly as he brought the cup to his lips.

"We all have to go sometime," he said. "'Course that's a good old

saying and all, but it don't help when you lose someone you love. I loved that woman something terrible."

"Did she suffer long?"

"Naw. They took good care of her there in the hospital. Then one day I called up and they told me they was sorry."

"You save the medicine on purpose?" I asked.

"Uh-uh." He shook his head negatively. "I didn't throw away nothing of hers. I got all her clothes and everything, even got her stuff from the hospital."

"Do you want to tell me about Billy?" The gentle thuds of the businessman's fists against the bag had given away to a huffing sound as he started jogging in place. A few other guys drifted into the gym, young, flat-bellied, eager to learn. I watched them as they went into the locker room.

"That's the trouble, right there." Pop's voice cracked slightly as he spoke. "They keep coming, younger and stronger, and they don't know what anything means. They see Billy and all they see is that he's getting a little slower. He don't punch so hard, he don't keep his mind on his fighting like he used to. These young fellows don't see what he was, what he meant to us. You know what I mean?"

I told him I did.

"It weren't right for him to keep on fighting. Just to go down like he was nobody and leave the title to some boy who ain't got nothing going for him except he was born too late to know what getting old is."

"You want some more coffee?"

"Naw, I drink too much of this stuff already." Pop put the cup down, then picked it up again, and finished it off. "There's no way Billy was going to beat that boy. All the gamblers knew it, everybody he worked with knew it. I thought if he got a little flutter before the fight he'd back on out, maybe give us another chance to talk to him.

"I give it to him that morning and he didn't act like it bothered him none. He just went on out there and fought that boy. He didn't look too bad there for a while, either . . . You got any idea what I'm talking about?"

"Pop—" I started awkwardly.

"You ain't fixing to go downtown, are you?" he asked. "Cause if you are I could use a lift."

"O.K., Pop, O.K."

We stood for a while, listening to the sounds of the gym, the gym that was meant for younger men than we were, and who, because of their youth, shared a different place and time. Yeah, I had an idea what Pop was talking about. I took a deep breath and started to the door.



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What kind of maid was this Booney? . . .

THE BOONEY DIARY



by DAVID HOLMSTROM

September 24: I woke to the rattle of a toothache—not one of those blazing ones, but hot enough to use it as an excuse. So I had breakfast in bed. Booney's eyes didn't like me again. She brought my breakfast and didn't say a word. I ate, slept, read, slept, awoke—the pain was gone. I leaped out of bed, but avoided my book and played the day away in sweaty jogging, exercising, chopping wood, and flying a kite. Booney scolds me by the way she runs the house; she bangs around,

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avoiding me, leaving hostility in each room like a disgruntled person. Where did Janice get her? Why does she look out of the window at me? Why does this scrubwoman think she can intimidate me?

September 25: I raked leaves all day. This lonely farmhouse is miles from anything or anyone. I can't write in cities. I like to rent tired old farmhouses and never tell anyone where I am. Tomorrow I'm having the phone disconnected. I called Sammy this evening and lied to him that the book was writing itself. I called Janice—cold, old, beautiful Janice—who refused to say when she was returning. Bermuda, she said, is healing her. What hogwash. (That click—was that Booney listening from the kitchen?)

September 26: The phone went today. The guy never said a word to me; with a skinny screwdriver he severed my link to the world. If I do no writing, I need to make no excuses. Now it's just the farm and Booney. Booney, leave me alone. Stop peeking at this diary when I'm outside!

September 27: (Are you reading this, Booney? You sneak in here, don't you, and read this? Stay out of my privacy or I'll smash a few windows in that damn greenhouse of yours!) Hot dogs and diddle! I found a new voice in me; a new rhythm for the book. Now I can thunder! I must keep my life smooth to protect my rhythm. Janice, hurry back! I will talk softly. I will say the words you want to hear. I will be new.

September 28: It rained today. I hit a low ebb; the rhythm disappeared like a-dying blue vapor. Where did it go? How? I see terror out the small window of this room. I see lonely bony hills of brown and grey, and I swim deeper and deeper the wrong way. I need to be able to live with no sleep. I need to be able to sleep with no dreams. I need to be able to have a phone and use it like a bar of soap instead of a candy bar.

Janice, please come back. I will do all you want—division of labor; consultation over rights, even romance, just the way you want. I need you to gardenia my nose, I need your softness.

(Booney, is that your thumbprint? Stay the hell out of this diary! I

warned you, scrubwoman. Tomorrow I strike your greenhouse!)

September 29: I broke two windows. Booney was inside, at the far end, and without a word she ran the full length of the greenhouse aisle like a charging water buffalo, her apron flying. I was stunned, amazed, enthralled, delighted.

She tackled me—I swear it—as sure as I am an ex-football player. She tackled me because I froze and couldn't move from behind the potting shed where I had crept with the BB gun. Ping! Ping! went the little thing. Two windows cracked, and through the door came Booney, fire in her deep blue eyes; pawing at the air, and in a flash she shortened the distance between the two of us and tackled me, flattening me against the shed like a wafer with her shoulder in my stomach.

"You cannot shoot at me!" she said in her deep Marlene Dietrich voice. We wrestled for the gun, tears of laughter streaming down my face. I was amazed that she smelled so homey and earthy and that she was so strong. She grunted and raged in a foreign language, her leg wrapped around mine, trying to hurl me to the ground.

"You're fired!" I laughed, remembering that Janice had hired her. "I'm number four on *The New York Times* best-seller list!" She had her arm under my crotch and I had my leg around her buttocks, and we pushed and pulled at the BB gun until she lifted me up like an old broomstick and shoved me into the hedge, then stomped away triumphantly with the gun.

It was the closest I had ever been to a maid. You pass maids in hotels; you sleep in the beds they make, you eat the food they prepare, you miss them on their days off, but who wrestles with them so that you smell their bodies, see the roots of their hair, the fillings in their teeth? The roots of Booney's hair were not grey but brown. Very puzzling. How old is she? Where can I hide this diary?

September 30: I lick my wounds. The new conflict is marvelous. It is intrigue time instead of writing time. Like a big sister Booney looms on schedule into my bedroom, bringing my breakfast. Not a word, not a look, not a hint that we wrestled yesterday. She is large—no, tall and big-boned, taller than me. And she is coordinated enough to run well down the greenhouse aisle. How old is she? Where did Janice get her?

I stay in my room all day with the door locked. No writing.

Downstairs, like a muffled army, she vacuums, runs the washing machine, moves entire rooms of furniture, eats punctually at twelve, resumes her chores, thumps around, whistles foreign marches, and, at 5:30 on the nose, bangs on my door.

I put on my bathrobe. She enters the room, the tray heaped with homemade bread, roast beef, juicy carrots, a crackling salad, and incredible rice pudding. She has a light blue ribbon in her hair, like a break in the clouds. Her teeth are white and straight. Her face is not hard as it was at breakfast, but calm, almost soft, like evening near a lake. I motion to her to put the tray down.

"Come over here," I say, and she follows me to the desk. I brush all the papers to the floor. "Do you know how to hand wrestle?"

She nods, leans down, and puts her elbow on the desk. I lean down and clasp her hand, our heads six inches from each other. She looks at the desk, not me. We begin. I win the initial leverage by cheating, thrusting her hand downward, but not her wrist. I pull with all my strength, grunting like a baboon, baring my teeth in vulgar agony, surprised beyond belief that she is so damned strong. My eyes are riveted on her nose, subconsciously noticing how few wrinkles have invaded her face. She grits her teeth. I am giving her a a battle, but she will not look at me.

Then slowly, in direct proportion to the gradual rise of her arm, her eyes tiptoe up my bright red arm to my bright red face. Her arm straightens, curling slowly to overpower mine, breaking my leverage, breaking my heart, pulling my hand, wrist, arm, pride, and resilience down, down, until an inch from the desktop my knuckles resist poignantly for a split second. Then her eyes meet mine, a tiny light there enjoying her victory, the blue color blazing as if she were a direct descendent of the Vikings. Then, wham! My knuckles are dead.

She stands on Everest, Annapurna, and Fujiyama, and she smiles warmly down on me just as I notice that my bathrobe has drifted open during the battle, the sudden realization of which, when combined with my total defeat, plunges me back to infancy as if Booney was my mother. I cover myself shyly.

In that deep voice she says, "I have six brothers."

"Not here in this room you don't," I say, and she laughs splendidly, leaning forward in a kind of girlish way that surprises me.

"Ho ho ho, Mr. Stallworth!" she laughs.

"How old are you?" I ask.

"You did not write today," she says. "You are lazy, like all men and brothers."

"Where are you from?" I ask.

"Latvia," she says.

"That's not true," I say. "Latvia doesn't exist any more."

She points to her heart. "In here it does."

"How old are you?" I ask again.

"I'm not caring about that," she says. "I like your book. It is number four best-seller. You must write. You are lazy."

"Booney," I say, "I am 34."

She turns away. "I am your big sister," she says, walking quickly out of the room, unable to admit to that little edge of awakened femininity that whispers she does not want to be my big sister.

Janice, forgive me, but if you were here I would not be tampering thusly.

October 1: Dear *New York Times*: Please remove my name and book from your best-seller list and replace it with Booney Shaswenski and her mystery novel. Yesterday this Latvian shepherdess humbled me in hand-to-hand combat. It was no contest, but I, defeated, have irresistible curiosity about her. I want to keep turning the page, which is the hallmark of a well-written mystery. If she lost weight would she be beautiful? Or is she beautiful now in her peasant fatness and the eyes beholding her are culturally limited? Who is thin when all are different? I thought she was 45. How old is old? What am I thinking in this old farmhouse?

October 2: While she was out on the weekly shopping trip I crept into her downstairs bedroom to have a look. She has a large room—sunny and spartan. There, among a pile of paperbacks, is my book, a marker indicating it is three-fourths read. Foreign journals are stacked here and there.

A photo of her brothers is prominent on her dresser. And down in the corner of her mirror—almost as if it were intentionally hidden—is a small color photo of a beautiful young woman, maybe in her twenties, standing in front of a ski lodge, her blue eyes dancing with delight, her head tilted back a little, her mouth deliciously open while her blonde

hair swirls in a gentle wind. Is this Booney's sister? Maybe a cousin. Or is it Booney ten years ago?

Her closet is almost empty except for a handful of mute, sack-like dresses; a thick grey coat, matronly shoes, and candy-bar wrappers—dozens of candy-bar wrappers stuffed in a wastebasket in the closet, the hidden cause of her fatness. From all of this I conclude the following: she is definitely under 40, possibly lured to America as a domestic to escape her brothers. She is not timid, she is not stupid, she is strong, mysterious, and she reads. Her teeth are beautiful and her weakness is candy bars. What should I do about her interest in me? (Janice, this is your fault.) Should I not look beyond her huskiness, should I not find sexiness in her voice? Or should I find the sound of a kitchen maid?

October 3: No writing, not even a dribble, for three days. And no word from Janice. I can feel her disconnecting from me across an ocean. She told me once I was a professional hulk, a brute, a wrestler. "Your books are rough," she said. "They hurt my eyes."

She departed for a long recuperation in Bermuda with her old friend Betsy Shanlon, both of them floating onto the plane in smokey pastel dresses, waving at me like virginal maidens in a fairy tale leaving on a journey. Well, damn, she liked me once, maybe even loved me, back in those days when rough and soft were not trade-offs but novelties. Later I tried to soften, but Kansas sod, chunky and gritty, is not easily broken. I slouch too much and prowl at night. (What bull! I am a freckle.)

October 4: Booney has not slipped in here to read this for several days. She knows I'm not writing and she scolds me, tells me pointblank to write or she will not prepare my meals. She beat me at Ping-Pong last night, five out of seven games. She moved quickly from side to side; her long arms strong, bashing the little white ball as if it were a huge moth. When she finished she asked me, "When is Mrs. Stallworth returning?"

I leaned on the table and said, "Now, Booney, why do you ask that?"

She stiffened. "There are decisions—in the kitchen, the greenhouse, the living room."

"You make them," I said.

She turned and headed out the door to her room. "I am 34," she said in a deep tight child's voice. I stood in silence wondering how a 34-year-old woman got to the point of looking 45. Heartbreaks? A too-serious view of men and ideas? Loneliness?

October 5: I left the following note on the kitchen table: "Booney, this is an order. Tomorrow you are to take the pickup truck and drive into town to Claudia's, a woman's store on Cranston Street. You are to buy three dresses—three stylish modern dresses. A girl named Georgia will help you. Also go around the corner to the hairdresser after you buy the dresses. And for God's sake, don't buy any candy bars. When you have finished come directly to me."

October 6: She left early in the morning, roaring away from the house, driving in the manner she hand-wrestled and played Ping-Pong. I fixed my breakfast, noticing the crisp sunflower glow to her kitchen—the European touch of flowers here and there, the way the entire easy ambience from cupboard to counter defied Janice's management when she ruled the pots and pans. Janice always had a lot of knives around—long, sharp, dangerous ones, rattling like snakes in drawers, hanging from wall magnets like threats. But now they are gone. Booney seems fond of spoons, wooden ones, that are warm and rough, for stirring soups and hot broths. I counted nine in plain view.

I went up to my room and tried to write, but I drifted slowly away. I watched the clock inordinately, a little surprised how interested I was in what Booney might buy, how she would look. Janice always looked impeccable, as if a soft breeze kissed her all the time. She didn't sweat, she didn't play Ping-Pong, she hated hiking. She was fragile in bed, but she was impeccably beautiful moving from one room to another.

When I heard the truck making its way up the long driveway, I thought Booney would be a woman transformed, a Booney not from Latvia's countryside but a new kind of woman, sweatless and controlled, who would stare at me lynx-like while she baked bread, a new kind of woman with a bold roughness that verged on independence but was not quite yet there.

Down below I heard the truck door slam, I heard the kitchen door bang. Briefly she tended to something in the kitchen, then a drawer

was pulled open and shut. I heard her mounting the stairs, that familiar creaking adding to the adventure of the little drama I had devised. She came closer, across the short hallway—

She didn't open the door. Instead she began drilling holes in it with an electric drill just above the doorknob.

"Booney," I yelled, "what the hell are you doing? Where are the dresses?"

I tried to open the door, but she held it closed and continued drilling. I pulled with all my strength but she held it. I screamed at her foully, but she only yelled, "No, no, you be quiet!"

I rushed to the window and looked down at the truck. In the back were four long thick boards and some rope. "Booney, open that door or I'll break it down!" I paced the room, confused and angry. The drilling stopped.

I heard a bolt click, and a letter was slipped under the door. It had already been opened. It was from Janice:

Dear Jimmy,

I've given so much thought to us, and how we failed each other. Before I left for Bermuda I thought our conflict was all your fault, that your roughness and crudeness were deliberately done to upset me, to hurt me. But now I understand that roughness is simply your way of living as much as softness and ease are mine. I'm not able to change, and I don't want to, not even a little bit. And I don't think you can either. I'm sorry. I'm not coming back to you, Jimmy. One of the reasons I hired Booney before I left was because she seemed so blunt and rough. I hope she is taking care of you and that you are writing. . . .

I heard a bang outside the window. It was Booney reaching the top of a ladder, pushing the thick boards across the roof to my window. She was wearing overalls and had her hair cut short. She was sweating. Before I could come to my senses she had two nails driven in the window frame so I couldn't open it from the inside.

"This is a criminal act!" I screamed. "This is against the law!"

She boarded up the window, pounding huge nails with powerful blows from the biggest hammer I had ever seen. I took one of my

boots from the closet and bashed through one of the small panes of the window.

"No, no," she said, "do not do that." Within minutes I could see nothing but long slits of light and the grain of the wood. I lifted a chair above my head and bashed it again and again against the door, but the chair broke in half. Now, an hour later, I am writing this in a daze. Why has she done this? I thought she liked me, I thought—

I can hear her coming up the steps now.

October 7: I take the diary now. I write in it. I tell him, Jimmy, that I cook for him, I wash his clothes, I will be tough on him. You must write, I tell him, you are too lazy. You must think of me only as a big sister. It is not a prison I fix for him, it is a quiet room. WRITE! WRITE! I tell him, or else I never let him out.



Eadleigh meant nothing but trouble . . .

A BULLY'S DOWNFALL

by
**JOHN'H.
DIRCKX**



PART I

Mr. Alfred Pinksett rested his elbow on the window ledge and his chin in the hollow of his hand as, puffing serenely at his pipe, he regarded his nominal domain with a lordly and contented eye. This domain, which figured in the rental agent's circulars as Sea Mist Terrace, comprised a sprawling tract of coastland a mile or two from Bexhill,

adorned here and there with a villa of the sort rather absurdly designated as "semi-detached." Fresh from the builder's trowel and still untenanted, the villas lay scattered amid broad expanses of gravel and mud, varied by an occasional heap of broken bricks or a tangle of splintered timbers and rusting iron. The only verdure in the landscape was contributed by several exuberant patches of weeds and some stunted evergreens of the hardier sort able to survive winter's cold and to subsist on a rocky soil liberally dosed with sea salt.

The vantage from which Mr. Pinksett so complacently surveyed the Terrace was the sitting room of an old but very comfortable house. In return for managing the properties, Pinksett and his wife had the house rent free and a modest wage besides. The position seemed a very pleasant sinecure indeed.

As he sat at his ease, perhaps Alfred Pinksett let his thoughts stray to a former day, in which his life had not been so tranquil nor his conscience so untroubled. Perhaps he lingered, a little reluctantly, over a chapter of his past that shed a distinctly unflattering light on his character, and of which even his wife knew nothing.

Whatever his thoughts may have been on that summer morning, it is certain that he had no inkling of the events that a cruel and ironic fate was even then preparing for him, nor did he dream that a part of the past was moving inexorably back into the present in the person of a heavy, brutish-looking workman who was at that moment trundling a barrow along the path that led down from the cliffs to the house.

Leaving his barrow at the garden gate, the workman made his way to the porch and executed a heavy-handed flourish on the knocker, augmenting it immediately with a penetrating and rather unpleasant whistle.

"Name of Crownower?" he inquired in a barely civil tone of Mrs. Pinksett, who opened the door. "About a leaking roof?"

"My, how quickly you've come!" twittered Mrs. Pinksett. "It was only yesterday that I told Mr. Crownower about it. It's Rose Arbor Villa, the one with the two gables, over there."

"I can see the arbor all right, Missus, but not the roses," remarked the workman, in a surly attempt at wit. "What about his leak?"

"It's in the bedroom at the back, to the left of the hall. The plasterers only finished a week ago Wednesday, and now they have their

work to do over again, for the rainwater came down the wall in a perfect flood during the squall we had Sunday night."

Had the roofer been content to go about his clear-cut duties at that moment instead of indulging a penchant for disputation, his whole future would have been very favorably affected. But he did not fetch his barrow and go to work. He merely scowled in the general direction of Rose Arbor Villa and shook his head with heavy scepticism.

"That there is a brand-new roof, Missus," said he. "I expect your rainwater came in around one of them gable windows."

"Why, no, that can't be so; the ceiling is wet through and ready to fall down like a great slab of dough, if it hasn't done already."

"Must be an open place under the eaves, then," affirmed the roofer, still reluctant to believe that the problem lay in his line. "Look you, Missus, I'll just trot down there and take a look, if you'll hand me the key. The barrow may as well stay where it is for the moment; it may not be wanted, and that is a devilish steep path."

Just as Mrs. Pinksett stepped into a snug little wainscotted room off the hall, which by reason of its diminutive but businesslike desk and a rack of keys on the wall was designated "the office," her husband emerged from the sitting room and peered inquisitively through the front door. No sooner did he see the man who waited on the porch than his jaw dropped open and his face turned a sickly shade of grey. Without stopping to speak to his wife, he quickly slipped out through the door and banged it shut behind him.

At this, the roofer looked up with a start, and then he too changed color, though in his case the resultant hue was more like that of an old penny. "Tom Snedden!" he exclaimed with a savage leer, "so there is a just God in heaven after all!"

"Tom Snedden is dead," replied the other. "I am Alfred Pinksett now, Mr. Pinksett to the likes of you, and I'll thank you to take yourself off from here this instant."

"What a ranting whelp it is!" exclaimed the roofer, who showed no inclination to depart. On the contrary, he leaned his broad back against the railing of the porch and inserted his thumbs into the armholes of his vest. "How long is it, Töm, since you run away and left me and Phil Dewmassy to stand the racket alone? Four years me and Phil spent in Dartmoor, and eleven I've been in Hastings—that's fifteen all told, Tom, and you don't look a day older than you did that night in

Maidstone."

"What's past is past, Jack," said Pinksett. "For God's sake say nothing—"

At that moment the front door opened and Mrs. Pinksett, somewhat surprised to find her husband on the porch engaged in animated conversation with the roofer, handed out the key of Rose Arbor Villa. "That's all right, Bett," said Pinksett, taking the key from her and fairly pushing her back into the house. "I'll attend to this gentleman."

He drew the door shut and struck resolutely along the path that led to the villa with the leaking roof, with the other following closely. When they had gone some ten paces Pinksett stopped and turned to confront his companion. "Look here, Jack Eadleigh," he said, in a tone meant to carry no further than the other man's ears, "the police nabbed you fair and square in that job at Maidstone. What would have been the good of me coming back to give myself up? It isn't as if I got away with any of the swag—you and Phil Dewmassy had it all between you, and as like as not you never meant to give me an honest share anyway. And it wasn't me decided to break a stick over the old man's head. 'Get in at night,' said I thirty times if I said it once. It was your own doing if you got four years instead of six months."

The dull coppery flush, which had faded momentarily from Eadleigh's coarse features, now returned, accompanied by a feral scowl. "You was always a sneak, Tom," he growled, "and you're a sneak yet. Afraid to take your own part in a dust-up, and now afraid to look the world in the face under your own name. Perhaps I ought to stop back another time and tell your missus what a rotter she's got linked up with."

"If you did that, Jack, it would be the last thing you ever did on this earth," countered Pinksett. "I may have been a sneak once, yes, and a coward too, for I didn't have the strength of character to keep clear of scum like you and Phil Dewmassy. But that's all past now. I've begun with a clean slate and a new name, and I haven't spoken a hard word nor done a mean thing since Maidstone. My wife is a far better woman than I deserve, but she loves me, and I will do what I must to keep her. Take care how you bluster and threaten; I may not be the milksop that I was."

But Eadleigh seemed unimpressed and only gave a scornful laugh. "You don't frighten me, Tom Snedden," said he, "no more'n a rabbit in

a trap. For it's a trap you're in, though you may not know it. Do you think I can't go round to the police any time I like, and tell them who and what you are?"

"That's all talk," snapped Pinksett, "and you can stow it. The time has run out on that job at Maidstone, and all the others too. The police don't want me any more; they can't do nothing to me now, and no more can you."

During this exchange, the two men had gradually moved along the path in the direction of Rose Arbor Villa, which still lay a great way below them. They had just reached a point where the path traversed a picturesque but treacherous rock slide when Pinksett delivered his last defiant speech. Eadleigh, overcome by rage and exasperation, turned on the man upon whom, in his twisted view, lay the blame for all his earthly woes, and raised his fist.

Pinksett had spoken more truthfully than his assailant dreamed when he affirmed that he was no longer the coward of former days, and he faced up to the bully with a pluck that a much larger man might not have displayed. Somewhere he must have acquired the rudiments of boxing, for he threw one arm before his face by way of a guard, and, taking up a widely based stance, was drawing back his right arm preparatory to landing a punch on Jack Eadleigh's pugnacious chin when fate intervened once again in the relations of the two men.

Eadleigh, somewhat disturbed by the warlike posture of his adversary, hastened to buttress up his own position by throwing back one leg, a proceeding that unfortunately had anything but the desired consequence, for instead of planting that leg on solid ground he stepped backwards off the path into thin air, and, without uttering so much as a grunt, plummeted out of sight.

For a long moment, Alfred Pinksett stood staring in awe at the empty space that had just now been occupied by the very real and substantial Eadleigh. Then, dropping to his hands and knees and craning his neck over the edge of the path, he saw, some twenty feet below, the crumpled and inert figure of his erstwhile opponent. With considerable difficulty, he scrambled down the steep face of the cliff, dislodging torrents of broken rock at every step, until he stood at last over the motionless form.

He had no need of professional advice to be assured that Eadleigh

was dead. The big man had fallen head first upon a broad flat boulder and must have died instantly, for already his right eye seemed glazed over with a film. The left one was swollen shut and buried in the midst of a huge purple tumescence that spread from the left side of the brow to the chin.

Pinksett's first care, after ascertaining that Eadleigh was beyond help, was to learn whether the incident had been observed. Instead of trying to regain the upper path, he crawled on all fours to another that lay lower down, and then doubled back at a trot in the direction of the house. There were two or three vessels on the quiet slate-grey water, but all of them appeared near the horizon, and unless one of them contained an inquisitive party equipped with a mariner's glass, the chances seemed remote that the accident had been noticed in that quarter.

To landward, all seemed equally secure, but just to make doubly sure, after casting an anxious glance at the windows of the house, Pinksett climbed the path to the top of the cliffs, where he had an uninterrupted view of the land for half a mile round. To his satisfaction, there wasn't a soul in sight, and only the roofer's lorry in the road to show that he had come that way.

Pinksett now descended the path again, but instead of approaching the house he took up the shafts of the barrow that stood at the garden gate and wheeled it as rapidly as he dared along the path to Rose Arbor Villa. The barrow was uncommonly heavy, and encumbered with a long solid ladder, so that Pinksett had a great deal of difficulty keeping it from racing off down the path, or, worse, throwing him over the side. When he came to the place where Eadleigh had gone over, he kept close to the face of the cliff and passed the spot without mishap.

The lower path, which led up from the beach, intersected the upper path at a point not far from the first of the villas, and here he came to a halt and carefully moored the barrow against a thick woody shrub growing wild out of cleft in the rock. Almost without being conscious that he was thinking, he had matured a plan for the disposal of Jack Eadleigh's body and, what was more important, for preserving the secret of his own identity.

Alfred Pinksett was at bottom a perfectly honorable man. In his younger days a certain lack of fortitude had combined with dire pecuniary straits to lead him into occasional criminal enterprises of a petty nature, but through it all he had preserved a fundamental integ-

rity that, even now, recoiled from the notion of deceiving the authorities, not to mention his wife. But he had also that instinct of self-preservation which in military heroes is called strategy and in criminals low cunning, and it was that which prompted him to adopt the measures that he now took.

Of course Eadleigh's death had been accidental; the most biased observer would have admitted that, for Pinksett had never swung the first punch, must less landed it. But there had been no observers, biased or otherwise, and if the police questioned Bett she would be bound to say that she had last seen Eadleigh walking off along the path in company with her husband. The police would be certain to inquire into the relations of the two men and might even turn up that malevolent drunkard Dewmassy, who would lose no time in identifying Pinksett as Tom Snedden, the retired cracksmán.

It was not a prison term he feared—for in truth the statutory limit had long since run out on the last of his peccadillos—but just the unwelcome disclosure of his past life coming to the ears of his wife. How would the dearest and purest of women take the news that her husband of six years was nothing but a common criminal, had in fact married her under a false name, which rendered their marriage contract a cheat and a lie?

Without pausing to consider the answer to that question, Alfred Pinksett set about concealing the circumstances of Eadleigh's death, aided and inspired by that instinct of low cunning to which we have alluded. He had observed that the iron wheels of the barrow left a very conspicuous track in the patches of soft sandy loam that occurred intermittently in the course of the path. To wheel the barrow along the lower path to a spot below that where the body lay might easily draw the attention of the police to that spot. And as Pinksett had decided to use the barrow as a means of transporting the body to the place where he proposed to set the stage for a counterfeit accident, he now found it necessary to bring the body across twenty yards of extremely rough ground.

After an uneasy glance in the direction of the house, he climbed to where the body lay, more ghastly than ever now that a sticky purple patch of blood had run over the lethal boulder. He seized it by the collar and succeeded in dragging it to the barrow and tumbling it in on top of the rolls of lead and chest of tools that lay within.

Once more lifting the handles of the barrow, he pressed on down the path toward Rose Arbor Villa, noting with grim satisfaction that the weight of the dead man, instead of making the handling of the barrow more difficult than before, served as a sort of ballast.

When he arrived at the villa, he redoubled his caution, for he was now in plain sight of anyone walking along the cliffs, or of his wife if she should chance to look this way from the house. Moving with great urgency, he pushed the heavy barrow over a stone-paved court and into a barren garden where the villa effectively screened him from observation, except from the sea where the water was as clear of craft as before.

Pinksett now set about the most difficult and dangerous part of his scheme. Eadleigh had been sent off to repair the roof of Rose Arbor Villa; subsequently he had died in an accidental fall. Was it not merely a break of fate that his fall had been from the path instead of the roof of the villa? What was this undertaking upon which Pinksett had embarked but simply an effort to amend that curious quirk?

He hauled the ladder erect and placed it against the roof of a shallow veranda that faced the garden and the sea. Conspicuous among the miscellaneous tackle stowed in the barrow was a coil of stout rope. Having deposited the lifeless Eadleigh unceremoniously on the ground, Pinksett proceeded to uncoil the rope and to take two turns of it round the dead man's torso just under the arms, making the end secure with a bowline. Then, ascending several rungs of the ladder, he carried the line over the topmost rung and began laboriously hauling the heavy corpse aloft.

He was obliged to stop many times for breath, and at length to mount the ladder again and struggle his grisly burden over the coping of the roof, but at last the thing was done.

After undoing the rope and casting it free, he thought of the key to the villa which still lay in his pocket. With what appeared to him to be sheer inspiration, he drew out the key and thrust it into one of Eadleigh's trouser pockets. Then, crouching low and being careful to maintain his foothold on the gently sloping roof, he tugged and strained the great motionless carcass of Jack Eadleigh nearer and nearer to the edge until it began slipping away by its own weight. And for the second time in an hour Alfred Pinksett, the former Tom Snedden, watched in horrified fascination as his old nemesis plunged away into space.

Despite a sudden feeling in his nether limbs, as though they had turned to rubber, he made his way back down the ladder. Having restored the rope to the barrow and cast a sharp eye over the scene to make certain that no detail had escaped him, he set off along the path with clammy skin and pounding heart, intent upon applying for succor to a certain square bottle he kept in the pantry.

Meanwhile, at the foot of the sharp declivity just below Rose Arbor Villa, the remains of Jack Eadleigh, more battered than ever, lay stark and still among a litter of smashed bottles and carpenter's scraps.

PART II

Narrated by Christopher Jervis, M.D.

"We find," announced the foreman of the coroner's jury, "that the deceased, Roderick Cowgill, met with his death accidentally and by misadventure."

"Yes," said the coroner, noting down the decision. "That is the only reasonable conclusion from the facts that have been presented in the course of this inquest."

As the finding of accidental death became for all time the official explanation of the demise of the unfortunate Cowgill, several of those assembled in the grand ballroom of the Hampton Hotel gave visible and audible signs of relief.

Before adjourning the inquest, the coroner relaxed slightly and addressed one of those persons in the following terms: "Mr. Eckwelms, I need not tell you that I share in the relief that you and your family must feel at this decision. I only hope that you are properly aware of the immense debt of gratitude you owe to Dr. John Thorndyke, whose presence here and whose admirably lucid presentation of the facts surrounding Rory Cowgill's death have spared you the ignominy of a trial upon the capital charge of murder, and perhaps even the death sentence."

"And," he continued, turning now to a pale-faced little man with a scholarly roundness of shoulder who sat fidgeting in a corner, "I also hope that this demonstration of the fallibility of circumstantial evidence will prove a valuable lesson to the official police, who have in this case displayed much more zeal than discretion."

The coroner abruptly shut his manuscript book and adjourned the

session, whereupon most of the persons in the great echoing room crowded around young Joe Eckwelm to congratulate him on the outcome of the inquest. One or two stepped up to Thorndyke and expressed their gratitude in awed whispers. As we prepared to leave, the representative of the police to whom the coroner had directed his rather plain-spoken remarks stepped forward and saluted us hesitantly.

"That was a fine piece of reasoning, Dr. Thorndyke," said he, without a trace of rancor or sarcasm, "and no man can be more grateful than I that you broke down our case against Joe Eckwelm so completely. Mr. Boynes spoke the truth when he said it was a lesson to us to watch our step in a murder case—that is, in a case that looks like murder but may not be.

"And now, would you believe it, sir, while this inquest was in session a message was handed to me, to the effect that another man has been found dead, at the bottom of a cliff. There appears to be no question of foul play, but I am wondering whether you would consider coming with me and my men to the scene and showing us just how a scientific investigator goes about gathering evidence."

Thorndyke nodded genially as, turning to me, he asked, "We've no pressing engagements until Friday, have we, Jervis? I don't see why we couldn't go along with Inspector Middlerand and lend him a hand."

The Inspector—who looked as unlike a police detective as it is possible to conceive—evinced great pleasure at Thorndyke's rejoinder. Having collected a constable from the police station, we proceeded in an ambulance of sorts, which had evidently begun life as a char-à-banc, to a barren-looking stretch of coast two or three miles outside the town.

Here we were met by another uniformed constable, who was lounging against a lorry near the edge of the cliff but snapped smartly to at our approach and reported to Middlerand: "A roofer, Inspector—this here's his lorry. He fell off the roof of one of them new cottages down there and went smack on over a rockslide. Must be a drop of forty feet in all. Cracked his head open, sir. It's not going to be easy getting him up from down there."

"How near is the body to the water?" asked the Inspector.

"No more than a hundred yards, but you'd never get a boat in under them rocks. If I may make a suggestion, Inspector, there's a long coil

of rope in this fellow's barrow, down beside the house. There are enough of us here, if every man lends a hand—"

"See here, Southworth," said the Inspector, in a tone of mild reproof, "these gentlemen are not a couple of navvies come to recover dead bodies out of gravel pits. This is Dr. Thorndyke, the medicolegal expert who came down from London for the inquest on Rory Cowgill, and that is his assistant, Dr. Jervis."

"That's all right, Inspector," laughed my colleague. "Jervis and I will cheerfully take our turn at the ropes, but just now perhaps we ought to get as close as practicable and survey the scene."

"Very right, Doctor," agreed Middlerand. "Who was it found the body, Southworth?"

"A lady, by the name of Pinksett," replied the constable. We had started down a rather steep path cut in the face of the cliff and were now passing by a handsome old house of weatherbeaten brick that seemed perched on the rim of an overhanging rock ledge. "The lady lives here, sir. She and her husband look after all them cottages along to the west. They're all brand new and still empty. I've taken her statement already, and we may as well go straight down and see the body."

"Lead the way, Southworth. Has he been identified?"

"Yes, sir." He produced a greasy imitation-leather wallet. "His name is John Francis Eadleigh, and he is employed by a firm of builders in Hastings. I've spoken to the manager and he said this chap had no family and precious few friends, for he was an ill-natured brute, and worse when he was drinking, which I gather was pretty often—"

"Yes, yes, Southworth," interrupted the Inspector. "And these people—what d'you call 'em? Pinksett?—are in charge of the properties? They must know this fellow, eh?"

"Not exactly, sir. The lady sent word the other day to the contractor who built these cottages that one of them had a leaky roof—that one there, with the two dormer windows like eyes and that trellis thing stuck on by the chimney. Then this Eadleigh came along this morning and asked for the key so he could go down and mend the leak. She gave it to him, but it was her husband who took him down and showed him the house."

"And how did they come to find him dead?"

"They went looking for him. As you can see, they have a clear view

of the cottage from their place, and they saw never a sign of him on the roof, nor heard the first tap of his hammer. About two o'clock when they went down to investigate, they found his cart in the garden and his ladder leaning against the roof, but no Mr. Eadleigh. Fallen asleep over his lunch pail, they thought, but when Mr. Pinksett went up to the door he found it shut fast and when his wife happened to look over the porch railing she saw the poor chap down below on a heap of rock."

We had been descending all the while, but now the path, after intersecting another that seemed to run up from the beach, became almost level and led us straight to the scene of the accident. The little cottage stood at the edge of a half-acre plot of rock-strewn mud. Just beyond it the land fell away abruptly almost to the water's edge, and it was obvious that a fall from that side of the roof would be likely to propel a man straight on down to the foot of the cliff.

As we passed round the side of the cottage, two mute witnesses of the tragedy came into view—a ladder propped against the porch roof and a two-wheeled handcart drawn up in a little court paved with flagstones.

"You can see him better from the porch, sir," said Constable Southworth. "And that edge is as crumbly as peat. I had to go half a mile round before I could climb down to him without breaking my own neck."

We crowded onto the porch and took our turns standing two abreast and peering over the railing down the dizzying drop, at the bottom of which lay the unfortunate John Francis Eadleigh. A hideous wound of the head was visible even at that distance, and it was obvious from the flailed attitude of the limbs that Eadleigh had died instantly.

"The first order of business," said Thorndyke, "is to examine the body *in situ*. Let us see that rope, constable—yes, this will serve nicely, I think." He took the coil of rope from Constable Southworth and, with speed and dexterity, fashioned a large loop in one end. Then, taking two turns of the rope around the stout cornerpost of the porch roof, he proceeded to place the loop around his middle and draw it up tight below his arms.

"Why, you're not gong down there on that rope?" exclaimed Inspector Middlerand. "It may do very well for hauling up a dead man, but for sending down a living one—"

"I am sure it will do admirably," said my colleague, handing the coil of rope with serene confidence to the Inspector. "Pay out the line slowly and steadily, and when I am down you may draw it up and send Jervis after me."

As soon as we had taken up the slack, he mounted the porch rail, lowered himself over the side, and disappeared gradually from our view as we let out the rope.

I then made the descent without any worse mishap than the loss of my hat, which Thorndyke had already retrieved before I reached the bottom. The spot where the body lay was a bleak and forlorn hollow, hedged all about with fallen rock.

Having restored my hat and assisted me to disengage myself from the rope, Thorndyke resumed his inspection of the body. The lethal wound had quite crushed the victim's face, no doubt shattering the underlying bone. It was obvious that the neck was broken. With meticulous care, Thorndyke changed the attitude of the body in order to examine the wound more fully, then turned his attention to the limbs and, finally, the clothing.

He seemed to find something interesting about the boot-tops, and as he proceeded from them to the waistband and thence to the collar, his interest steadily grew. Inserting his finger within the collar, he withdrew a small mass of green vegetable matter, which he examined critically with his lens, then sniffed, and finally held up for my inspection.

"Fool's parsley," I announced after a careful survey of the withered sprigs.

"You will recall," Thorndyke commented, "that it is also known as the lesser hemlock—a rather nasty poison. It is occasionally responsible for outbreaks of sickness among cattle and horses, though it is seldom lethal."

"Well, this chap was certainly not poisoned with it," said I. "This is an even clearer case of accidental death than that Cowgill business."

"Look around you, Jervis," said my companion. There was something so grave and sinister in his tone that it fairly made my flesh creep. "Do you see any fool's parsley, or for that matter any other vegetation worthy of the name, along the path the body must have taken in falling from that roof?"

"No, Thorndyke, I'm hanged if I do."

"There are quantities of crushed weeds inside the deceased's boot-

tops," said my companion, "and also inside his waistband and collar. His hip pocket, which, as you see, is provided with a flap, is empty, but the button is stained green and has a few scraps of vegetable matter caught under it. All this looks as though the body had ploughed head first through a patch of weeds, whereas nothing of the sort can have happened."

"Perhaps he'd taken another fall earlier in the day?" I suggested.

"That is possible, but hardly a likely explanation for these findings. No man would endure the sensation of all this herbage inside his collar for a quarter of a minute before plucking it out."

The police officers, who had been peering over the porch railing by turns, must have caught snatches of our conversation, for they now began to signify their curiosity and impatience by calling down a variety of irrelevant questions. At length, to their great satisfaction, I raised the upper part of the body while Thorndyke worked the rope sliding down over the shoulders and under the stiffened arms.

"Stand by to haul away," I heard Middlerand sing out with a jaunty nautical air.

"Just a minute!" shouted Thorndyke. "We haven't finished here yet." In its new position the corpse had presented some previously unobserved feature to Thorndyke's alert eye, for he produced his lens once again and stooped over the rumpled shirt front, where it protruded above the chalk-smeared vest. "What do you make of this, Jervis?" said he, pointing to a yellowish-brown stain on the rather dingy linen.

I bent close to examine it through the lens. "A smear of roofing tar," I hazarded dubiously at last.

"Use your nose again," he suggested.

"Why, it's tobacco!" I cried. "Or, rather, some product of tobacco. I don't suppose he was chewing it?"

"There is no tobacco in any form on his person," replied Thorndyke. "That stain is, nevertheless, exactly what you have called it—a product of tobacco. I shall leave it to you to think of a way in which it might have come there while we are getting the unfortunate gentleman aloft."

Puzzle though I might over this enigma, I had arrived at no conclusion by the time the body of John Eadleigh lay upon the porch, and Thorndyke and I had been hauled up again.

While the constables coiled up the rope and returned it to the handcart, Thorndyke reviewed his findings with Inspector Middlerand, who seemed most impressed, and spent considerable time peering through my colleague's Coddington lens at the aberrant scraps of vegetation, the tobacco stain, and particularly at various aspects of his own left hand.

"This is surely very queer," he said at last. "How do you suggest that we proceed, Dr. Thorndyke?"

"I should recommend getting the body to a mortuary as soon as possible," replied Thorndyke. "But first may I suggest a look inside the house? This key is evidently not the property of the deceased." He held up a steel latchkey attached by a ring to an immense slab of hardwood on which the words "Rose Arbor Villa" had been burned with an iron.

"And just as evidently this house is not our property," observed Middlerand. "If you really think we ought to look inside, we must have a warrant."

"I fancy that, as the place is clearly unoccupied, the Pinksetts would make no difficulties about a search. Unless you positively forbid it, I propose to step inside and have a look around while your men are placing the body on that barrow."

Without giving Middlerand the opportunity either to object or to assent to his proposal, Thorndyke whipped open the front door of the cottage and stepped inside. I followed him round from one empty and echoing room to another and observed nothing more sinister than a smell of fresh paint and a pot of whiting that had been overlooked in the kitchen. Thorndyke apparently saw nothing of note either, for he never once brought out the inevitable lens. "It seems doubtful that the deceased ever set foot in the house at all," he remarked to Middlerand as we came out.

The body now lay in awkward repose atop the tools and roofing materials in the handcart, and the constables were just taking down the ladder when Thorndyke stopped them with a word. To my surprise and their unmitigated horror, he mounted upon the porch roof and crawled coolly along to the point where Eadleigh had apparently gone over the side. "For God's sake, Thorndyke," I cried, "stay clear of the edge!" I felt not a little relieved when my colleague rejoined me.

Still he would not permit the ladder to be taken down; for now he

appeared to have found something on one of its lowermost rungs to examine through his lens. "Just look at this, will you, gentlemen?" he said. "No, you don't want the lens." And indeed there was no need of a magnifying glass to see the article in question, for it was a scrap of cloth a good two inches long, which had evidently caught on a splinter of wood and been torn away from some article of clothing.

"That's made a wreck of a good pair of britches, that has," was Constable Salton's comment.

"Agreed," said Thorndyke. "And that pair of britches is not far to seek." He stepped to the handcart and raised one of the legs of the corpse to show, in the back of the trousers just above the ankle, a tear corresponding exactly to the scrap of cloth on the ladder. "It is a little hard to understand how this cloth could have been torn away from the back of his trousers in the ordinary course of events," he said, "for no one but a madman goes up and down a ladder with his back to the rungs."

"He might have got onto the ladder backwards once in a while in coming off a steep roof," suggested Constable Southworth. "If he had the ladder the other way up, this rung might have caught the back of his trousers before he had turned himself around."

"That is an excellent suggestion," said Thorndyke, "except for one small matter. The ladder has a pronounced taper at the top, and it seems very doubtful that a man who earned his living by climbing ladders would make the mistake of erecting one upside down. Still, as the deceased is reputed to have been a drinker, you may be perfectly right."

Now began the melancholy—and arduous—climb up the steep path with the heavily laden handcart. The constables had hung the ladder on the hooks provided for it, and this made the task of pushing the cart a little less difficult for it gave another man a means of contributing his shoulder at the steep places, but even so it was a difficult climb.

We were nearing the point where the path became steeper, and Thorndyke and I were walking several paces behind the others in case of a sudden backsliding when my companion stopped abruptly and looked back along the path. "Have you observed how the wheels of the cart leave a track in the sandy places?" he asked.

"Yes," said I. "I noticed the wheel marks as we were going down,

and now I see that it must have been this very cart that made them for the two tracks are perfectly identical. Here is the mark of a chipped tread that the wheel has just made, and there is the identical mark on the other side going down."

"Right you are, Jervis. But I fancy that the tracks are identical even to a further extent than that." He stooped down and measured the depth of one of the tracks in a particularly loamy spot with the steel millimeter rule he always carried in his vest pocket. Then he repeated the proceeding with the immediately adjacent impression, and finally with the two on the other side of the path. "That is perfectly conclusive, I think. The wheels have sunk to the same depth in coming up the path as in going down."

I glanced up sharply, and in the brief instant that our eyes met, the sinister import of his discovery dawned fully upon me. Meanwhile the handcart had come to a stand, and Inspector Middlerand, dabbing at his brow with a handkerchief, left his place between the shafts and came down the path to us.

"You must be a magician, Dr. Thorndyke, if you can make anything out of that jumble of footmarks," he said.

"I am more interested in the marks made by the handcart," said my colleague. "Jervis and I have just ascertained that the tracks made in the soft places by the cart going down the path are equal in depth to the tracks we are making in bringing it up."

"Why, how can you tell the difference between the two tracks?" asked Middlerand.

"We could distinguish the one track from the other quite easily by comparing the marks of the two wheels, which are slightly different owing to some damage to the treads. But the great question is not which track is which, but how they can be of equal depth if the cart is now laden with a burden that must double the weight that rested on the wheels when it went down the path."

"I see what you mean!" cried Middlerand. "But what can he have taken down there in his cart, and what has become of it?"

"I rather imagine it was Mr. Eadleigh himself that went down in the cart," observed Thorndyke. "There is abundant evidence to suggest that he was killed, or at least struck unconscious, in some other place, and his body transported to the roof of the cottage and deliberately thrown off to conceal the true circumstances of his death."

"Doctor, it looks as if we've got a murder case after all!"

"It does look that way," agreed Thorndyke, "but let us not be hasty. We have reason to suspect that a deception has been practiced, but not necessarily that Eadleigh was the victim of a murderous assault."

"Here, Southworth," called the Inspector, "was there anyone else about when you first came down?"

"No, sir, just Mr. and Mrs. Pinksett."

"Did they say they saw this chap take his cart down there?"

"I don't recollect that they did. Mr. Pinksett walked down to the cottage with him to show him the leaking place in the roof, but he left his cart at the top of the path until he had looked over the damage."

"And so they never actually saw him come back along the path and wheel his cart down there?"

"They didn't say so, but of course he must have done."

During a rest period, not long after the path leading up from the beach had intersected our course, Thorndyke dropped to his knees again and applied his rule to another set of marks in a patch of soft sandy earth. "That's it!" he announced triumphantly, rising to his feet and dusting off the knees of his trousers. "The tracks made by the cart in passing over this stretch of the path are very much shallower than those we have just made in pushing it up. If, as seems likely, the body was taken down to Rose Arbor Villa on the cart, it must have been put on near the spot where that path from the beach joins this one."

"Let's get this job finished, I say," panted Inspector Middlerand, "and when the body is at the top of the cliff we can come down again and have a look along that side path."

We all agreed to this proposal, and presently had the satisfaction of feeling the iron wheels run easily over the level pavement at the head of the path. We loaded the body into the ambulance and, leaving Constable Southworth in charge, hastened back to the beach path and started along it with our eyes peeled.

Almost at once we became aware of a rather pronounced disturbance in the surface of the ground alongside the path. There were long linear furrows in the gravelly soil, and the weeds, more lush here in the shade of a ridge of rock, had been bruised and uprooted as by a heavy object dragged over them. The story told by these traces was only too plain, and when we had followed the trail through a patch of fool's parsley to the foot of a rockslide, where it abruptly ended, none of us

doubted that we had reached the point where Eadleigh had actually met his death. But if confirmation of the fact were needed, it was there in plenty. A rather conspicuous mound of gravel and freshly turned earth, upon being cleared away, was found to conceal a wide and irregular splash of blood that had soaked into a slab of chalk at the foot of the slide.

"That is the upper path directly above us," affirmed Thorndyke, pointing to a spot halfway up the rockslide where the path had been rudely buttressed from below with stout timbers driven into the face of the cliff. "The obvious conclusion from what we have observed is that Eadleigh either fell or was thrown off the path at that spot and that his body was moved from here on the cart to Rose Arbor Villa, hauled up the ladder to the roof, and thrown off into the pit where we found it."

"Why go to all the trouble of taking the body to the roof?" asked Middlerand. "If it had been thrown over the porch railing it would have come down in almost the same place."

"No doubt, but the scrap of cloth on the ladder, and some traces that I found upon the roof, point the other way. I think a visit to the Pinksetts is indicated."

We ascended the path again and filed rather solemnly onto the porch of the Pinksetts' house. Inspector Middlerand's knock was answered by a pretty little blonde woman, who was evidently quite overwhelmed to find such a throng of people on her doorstep. When the Inspector had introduced himself and us, we entered and passed into a sort of sitting room with windows along two sides commanding a splendid view of the sea.

"Now then, Mrs. Pinksett," began the Inspector in a businesslike tone, "Constable Southworth, who took your statement earlier, tells me that you did not see this man Eadleigh pushing his handcart down to the place where it was found. Is that correct?"

"Why, yes, Inspector, it is. My husband walked along the path with him to show him the damaged walls in Rose Arbor Villa, but he left his barrow there at the garden gate, for he thought it might not be wanted and the path is very steep. He must have come up later and taken it down, for when we went to look for him we found it in the little paved court next to the villa."

"You say your husband walked down with him? Where might Mr.

inksett be at this moment?"

"My husband is in bed, Inspector. This has upset him terribly and he has gone in to have a rest. I am sure, though, that if you wish it he will get up and speak to you."

Upon Middlerand's signifying that that was exactly what he did wish, the little lady disappeared through a darkened doorway, and after a delay of many minutes returned with her husband in tow. Pinksett had evidently taken the time to adjust his clothing and brush his hair, and to have a strong dose of the sort of nerve tonic that is customarily sold by the pint.

"We have been talking to your wife about this fellow's handcart," said the Inspector. "Did you see him wheel it along the path to Rose Arbor Villa?"

Pinksett had taken down from the mantelpiece an ancient cherrywood pipe with a long cracked stem, and this he proceeded to fill and light with great deliberation before answering. "I did," said he at length, amid clouds of blue smoke. "I stood there at the garden gate and watched him all the way down. I thought of going to help him, but it was all he could do to keep hold of the cart at the steep places, but he was a big 'un, and he got it down all right."

"Then you actually saw him wheel the cart into the garden next to the villa?" pursued Middlerand.

For a while Pinksett puffed at his pipe in dogged silence, laying his finger mechanically over the fuming crack in the stem each time he drew in a mouthful of smoke. In spite of its dilapidated condition it must have been his favorite pipe, for both his index fingers were deeply stained with smoke and tobacco tar. "That's what I said," he replied at last.

"Now, see here, Mr. Pinksett," said the Inspector, "that can't very well be true. The deceased never lived long enough to push his cart that far—now, did he?"

My attention was drawn away from Pinksett's haggard but impassive face by his wife's anguished cry. "Oh, Alf!" she sobbed, covering her mouth with her apron, "they know, *they know!*"

"Know what, my dear?" asked Pinksett in unfeigned surprise, and his voice grew tremulous as his wife crossed the room and put out her hands to him.

"They know, Alf, about that man, and how he fell backwards off the

path just when he was going to hit you!"

Pinksett let his pipe drop to the hearth, where it broke in pieces and sat back limply in his chair staring at the woman who knelt before him. "Bett!" he exclaimed, "how do you know about that?"

"I saw it happen, Alf—from the kitchen window. Even—even when you pushed him off the roof of the villa."

"You saw that?" said Pinksett, half choked with emotion. "And you said nothing? Why?"

"Oh, Alf, don't you know why? I saw it was an accident, but it might seem different to other people—to the police—" She stopped short suddenly conscious that this heart-rending domestic drama had a large and disconcertingly official audience.

"Better make a clean breast of it, sir," recommended Middlerand in a stodgy matter-of-fact tone. "If it was an accident, as the lady says, you've nothing to fear. But just don't you go trying to put one over on the police. You left a trail of clues a yard wide, such as a one-eyed goose could have followed, and we know pretty much the whole story already. I should advise you to come along with us to the station and make a full statement, when we shall decide whether any criminal charges are in order."

It is perhaps needless to add that the local magistrate, having reviewed the evidence and questioned Pinksett and his wife at some length, dismissed them from his court with a benevolent but solemn warning against future attempts to hoodwink so astute a criminal investigator as Inspector Middlerand.



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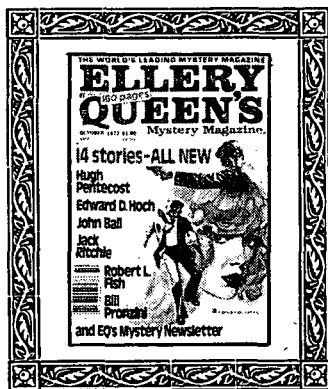
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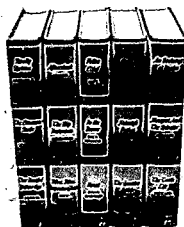
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